



BARBARIANS

In the Greek and Roman World

Erik Jensen

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By
Erik Jensen

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{VII} INTRODUCTION

The civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome did not flourish in isolation. They were part of commercial, cultural, and political systems that spanned Eurasia and Africa. Greeks and Romans lived, traded, exchanged ideas, and sometimes fought with peoples of many other cultures. To describe these peoples the Greeks invented the word *barbaros*, which the Romans adopted as *barbarus*. Sometimes these words carried a pejorative sting, but in other cases they were simply acknowledgments of cultural difference. Similarly, the interactions among Greeks, Romans, and other peoples were sometimes fraught with conflict but at other times peaceful and productive.

Histories of these interactions written before the late twentieth century tended to focus on wars and politics, with little attention to the complexities of identity in a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual world. Important work has been done in the field in recent generations, but much of contemporary scholarship has been focused on particular areas and topics whose connections to one another are not obvious at first glance. For those coming to the question without many years of study behind them, the subject can be an impenetrable one. This book looks at both the realities of the multicultural ancient world and the ways in which the Greeks and Romans attempted to understand it.

Why a History of Barbarians?

A history of barbarians in the Greek and Roman world serves two purposes. First, it places the history of Greece and Rome in a larger world-historical context. Second, it helps us understand the ways in which Greek and Roman ideas continue to shape how Western societies deal with a multicultural reality.

The ancient Mediterranean was a cosmopolitan place. Phoenicians, Greeks, Egyptians, Carthaginians, Romans, Etruscans, Gauls, and many others traded in the region's great market cities. Beyond the bustling Mediterranean, Greek voyagers ranged from the North Sea to the Indian Ocean. Roman soldiers marched from the deserts of Morocco to the edges of the Eurasian steppe. People, goods, and ideas flowed along routes that reached east to China, west to the Canary Islands, south to sub-Saharan Africa, and north to the Arctic. The societies we today think of simply as "Greece" and "Rome" existed within larger cultural contexts and included people of many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.



{viii} An artist's vision of the burial of the "ivory bangle lady," reflecting the ethnic diversity of late Roman York.

{viii} One example may stand for many others. A wealthy lady was buried in York in northern England in the fourth century CE with an assortment of bangles, some of white ivory from Africa, others of black jet, a gemstone mined in Britain. Examination of the remains using the techniques of forensic anthropology shows that she was of sub-Saharan African ancestry and had spent her childhood in a warmer climate, perhaps somewhere in coastal Western Europe.¹ While the "ivory bangle lady" left us no record of her own thoughts about her identity, she was clearly a person of wealth and status, and her choice of jewelry suggests a consciousness of being both African and British.

She was not alone. Individuals from Gaul, Italy, and Egypt are mentioned in Roman-period inscriptions around York. Local potters made cooking vessels characteristic of North African cuisine. The emperor Constantine began his rise to power in the city in 306 when he was first declared emperor by one of his companions, a Germanic king. Examination of burials in the city suggests that the population of York in the fourth century may have been more ethnically diverse than it is today.² The northernmost city of any size in the Roman empire, York was far from the cosmopolitan urban centers of the {ix} Mediterranean. But even in York, people of many different backgrounds lived and worked together.

Greek and Roman writers were aware of the cultural diversity of the world they lived in, and they had varying reactions to it. Some were contemptuous of other peoples. Others were aware of cultural differences and, though they preferred their own ways, did not look down on the ways of others. Some admired foreign customs. Many invented links between themselves and other peoples or sought to blur the lines that separated one people from another. Some saw in foreign peoples the opposite of their own identities, while others saw people much like themselves. No single narrative dominated how the people of

the ancient world thought about their cultural differences.

We know this broad variety of attitudes from sources that themselves represent only a narrow slice of Greek and Roman life. The authors of antiquity were mostly (though not exclusively) male, wealthy, and urban. They typically came from among the majority ethnic groups in their places of origin. This already narrow selection of literature was further winnowed as works were passed down and interpreted through history. Many works were lost, some already in antiquity. Those that survived tended to be congenial to contemporary political and social concerns. Later generations of Europeans and their colonial descendants, who came to look back on Greco-Roman antiquity as a source of philosophical authority, mined the surviving sources for ideas that suited their own needs. Passages that supported the social, political, and economic interests of a contemporary elite were elevated as representing the true and timeless opinions of ancient authorities, whereas those that did not were reinterpreted or ignored.

In the early twenty-first century we still carry the historical baggage of the European assimilation of ancient art and literature. Our world has been shaped in part by Greek and Roman beliefs about relations between people of different cultures and by the selective interpretation of those beliefs over the past five centuries. In an increasingly multicultural modern society, we must be conscious of our history. Reexamining Greek and Roman attitudes toward barbarians helps us understand not only how classical ideas continue to inform the modern world but also how much broader and more complex those ideas were than has traditionally been recognized.

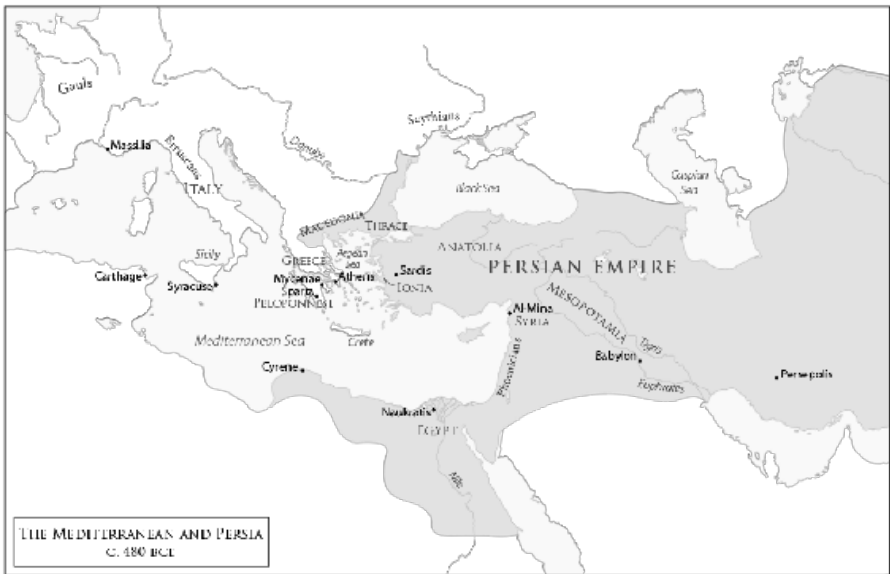
Given such a task, it may seem counterproductive to go on using the word “barbarian.” I retain the word for three reasons. First, it is the word that the classical sources themselves use. As we attempt to understand what ancient authors meant by calling other peoples “barbarians,” it does us no good to avoid the words they used. Second, the word itself is not static in meaning and does not always carry the same pejorative connotations we give it in {x} modern usage. We must be wary of carrying our own cultural baggage into the past. Finally, it reminds us that we are talking about cultures in relation to one another and not in isolation. “Barbarian” is inherently a relational term. We are only barbarians in the eyes of others.

Categories such as “barbarian,” which only have meaning within a particular cultural context, are known as social constructs. They are created by the collective beliefs and attitudes of a society. Social constructs are, in a sense, imaginary, in that they are not defined by tangible reality, but they cannot simply be dismissed or ignored. Social pressures—and sometimes legal authority—enforce these categories, often to the benefit of one group over another.

The enormous diversity of cultures in the ancient Mediterranean was a historical reality. The fact that we label many of these peoples “barbarians” is only a product of the tendencies of Greek and Roman thought and the privilege that the Western world has traditionally granted to Greek and Roman sources. The aim of this book is to explore how this category was created and how it related to

the realities of ancient Mediterranean life.

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1. S. Leach et al., "A Lady of York: Migration, Ethnicity and Identity in Roman Britain," *Antiquity* 84, no. 323 (March 2010): 131–45.
 2. *Epitome de Caesaribus* 41; R. Warwick, "The Skeletal Remains," in *The Romano-British Cemetery at Trentholme Drive, York*, ed. Leslie P. Wenham (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1968), 113–76; Vivien G. Swan, "Legio VI and Its Men: African Legionaries in Britain," *Roman Pottery Studies* 5 (1992): 1–33; H. Cool, "An Overview of the Small Finds from Catterick," in *Cataractonium: Roman Catterick and Its Hinterland*, ed. P. Wilson (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2002), 23–43; Patrick Ottaway, *Roman York* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004).









{1} CHAPTER 1

MEETING THE BARBARIANS

As we use it today, the word “barbarian” carries layers of meaning.¹ It implies a primitive culture lacking the technological, artistic, and social refinements of civilization. The popular image is of a muscular, unwashed, long-haired warrior, dressed only in scraps of leather and fur, hefting a massive ax or sword. This image conveys several important ideas about who barbarians are. The state of the body shows a lack of hygiene and grooming, while the bulk of muscle implies a simple life of physical exertion unaided by technology. Nudity, fur, and leather stand for an absence of practical arts, such as textiles. The enormous weapon, suitable only for wide slashing attacks, indicates a combat of individual rampage rather than coordinated mass maneuvers. Taken together, these signs imply the absence of even the most rudimentary elements of what we regard as a civilized life.

Such folk are imagined in two places: in far-off wastelands or uncomfortably near, waiting at the gates.² While the distant barbarians are only strange and primitive, the barbarians at the gates threaten to destroy our way of life if given any opportunity. Barbarians invade, destroy, and set up their own petty kingdoms in the ruins of greater civilizations. They do not build, invent, or improve anything.

In addition to this cultural poverty, there is a layer of moral poverty.³ We call a thing “barbaric” to condemn it, from slavery to professional sports.⁴ In this {2} moral sense, barbarians also pose a threat to civilization. They disregard our societies’ rules regarding when, how, and against whom violence may be used.



{2} A modern artist's interpretation of "barbarians."

These layers of definition share the idea of lack. Barbarians are defined by what they do not have: technology, education, social structure, settled homes, morality, respect for human life. The things that we hold most vital to our civilized way of life are things that barbarians do not, and perhaps cannot, possess. A barbarian is more than just "not one of us." A barbarian cannot even comprehend the appeal of being one of us.

From a different point of view, however, barbarians can also be a positive force. When a society doubts its own worth, barbarians offer an alternative, even a path to salvation. Thinkers of the Enlightenment period imagined a "noble savage" who lived a life of simple virtue free from the corruption of "civilized" life.⁵ To a civilization in decline, barbarians appear not as a destructive force but as the necessary flame that clears away dead wood. Barbarians can become part of the narrative of national rise and fall, wiping away civilizations that have run their course to make room for new, more vigorous ones to take their place.⁶ C. P. Cavafy imagined barbarians this way in his 1904 {3} poem "Waiting for the Barbarians," describing an idle and demoralized imperial city waiting for the arrival of barbarians who fail to appear. The end of the poem suggests that the barbarians were "a solution of a sort" to the state's troubles.⁷

In popular culture, barbarians have become a symbol of the power of unbridled will to solve problems that paralyze the civilized world. Literary characters such as Robert E. Howard's Conan and Roy Thomas and Barry Windsor-Smith's Red Sonja are marked not just by their muscle but also by their willingness to take action. These barbarians represent both a power fantasy and a protest against a modern society in which strength has given way to mechanics, heroes to committees, and individual initiative to collective impotence.⁸ These

literary heroes have helped create an archetype that lives in the “barbarian” characters of modern fantasy literature and the role-playing genre of games inspired by that literature.⁹

While these modern conceptions of the barbarian descend ultimately from Greek and Roman ideas, they also respond to the concerns of their own times. So did Greek and Roman conceptions of the barbarian. The idea has never been a static one. When classical sources, therefore, use the term *barbaros* or *barbarus*, we must not assume that it meant the same things to the authors and their audiences that “barbarian” has come to mean to us.

Barbarians in Greece and Rome

The origins of the Greek word *barbaros* are unclear. It may be attested (in the form *pa-pa-ro*) in a handful of Mycenaean texts from Pylos and Knossos dating to between 1600 and 1250 BCE.¹⁰ In this context it seems to mean “outsider” or “foreigner,” one who is not part of the community. The first clear attestation of the word comes from the middle of the eighth century BCE in the form *barbarophōnos*, meaning “speaking a foreign language,” used in the *Iliad* to describe the Carians.¹¹ From this point down to the {4} Greco-Persian Wars of 490–479 BCE, *barbaros* continued to have primarily a linguistic meaning, indicating a person who did not speak Greek. The repetition of “bar-bar” is thought to imitate the incomprehensible sound of a foreign language.¹²

For several centuries it meant little else, and there is scant evidence that Greeks who lived before the wars against Persia held any detailed or consistent views about what barbarians were like.¹³ From early contacts with Phoenician traders to the expansion of Greek colonies across the Mediterranean and Black Seas, the Greeks encountered many different kinds of societies in this early period. Some societies were small-scale, materially poor, and organized on tribal lines; others were massive, wealthy, sophisticated kingdoms. Egypt, in particular, had a special place in Greek foreign relations. Egypt, rich in grain but poor in metals, and Greece, rich in metals (or with access to areas that were) but poor in grain, were natural trading partners, and good relations between Greek cities and Egypt persisted until the time of Alexander the Great in the late 300s BCE.¹⁴

After the wars with Persia in the early fifth century BCE, “barbarian” became less a linguistic than a cultural term. Some writers began to argue that the world could be divided between Greeks and barbarians and that the former were superior to the latter.¹⁵ This new use of the term as a pejorative, however, was only one strand in an increasingly complex cultural conversation. Positive and neutral perceptions of outsiders were also in wide circulation. The fact that the Greek historian Herodotus, writing a generation after the Greco-Persian Wars, could matter-of-factly inform his readers that the Egyptians also called those who did not speak their language “barbarians” indicates that the word retained its simple sense of “foreigner.”¹⁶

{5} The concept of “barbarian” and “Greek” as opposing terms became more complicated in the fourth century BCE when the kingdom of Macedonia conquered both Greece and the Persian Empire. From the Greek point of view, the status of the Macedonians had always been difficult: they were either very barbarous Greeks or very Greek barbarians.¹⁷ The allies and enemies of the Macedonian king Philip II debated the merits of Macedonian rule and the wisdom of making war on Persia, deploying many different definitions of what it meant to be Greek or barbarian in the process.¹⁸ When the empire built by Philip and his son Alexander fell apart, Greeks found themselves subjects of Macedonian dynasts who had embraced Greek culture as the unifying principle in a sprawl of multi-ethnic kingdoms. Even for those living in Greece, the question of what it meant to be Greek or un-Greek had no simple answers when Greekness was a cultural currency circulating not just among Athenians and Spartans but also Macedonians, Persians, Jews, Egyptians, and many others.¹⁹

Among those who came to define their identity in relation to Greekness were the Romans, who adopted some elements of Greek culture while rejecting others. While Greeks had encountered other peoples primarily through trade and colonization around the Mediterranean coast, Romans were conquerors who built a massive Mediterranean and European empire.

In line with their imperial ambitions, Romans brought a new idea into the discussion: that barbarism was not a permanent societal trait but a state out of which people could rise. The success of the Roman empire lay in its ability to integrate people of many different backgrounds into a single state. In their earliest days, the Romans found ways of accepting outsiders as members of their community.²⁰ As the empire grew, this practice of incorporation was elaborated into an ideology asserting that it was Rome’s rightful destiny to rule all the world’s peoples. The boundaries of the empire were not fixed, and those who lived beyond them were regarded not as permanent outsiders but as those who had not yet been found worth the effort of direct {6} Roman administration.²¹ With the growth of the empire, the old mechanisms of incorporation into Roman society faltered, and the questions of whether, when, and how to include new peoples became not just a topic for philosophical discussion but the crux of political conflicts. There was never a settled definition of what it meant to be Roman, any more than of what it meant to be Greek. The expansion of Roman power allowed more and more people to define “Romanness” for themselves.²²

The expansion of Roman power between the second century BCE and the second century CE had consequences far beyond the empire’s frontiers. One of those consequences was the development of increasingly sophisticated political structures among the peoples who lived near but outside those frontiers. What may have begun as a necessary adaptation to deal with the Romans on a more equal footing led, by the third century CE, to the growth of large coalitions in northern and central Europe that were able to alter the balance of power in the Roman frontier zone. It is these peoples that we usually mean when we speak of historical barbarians today, but they were not the only force changing the face of

the Roman frontier.²³ Similar processes of organization led to growth of more powerful alliances in North Africa and Arabia. The rise of the Sasanian dynasty in Persia confronted Rome with an evenly matched rival in the East.²⁴ These changes in the balance of power meant changes both in Romans' conceptions of themselves and in how they thought about and treated barbarians.

In addition to the consequences of Roman expansion, other changes in late Roman society affected the definition of "barbarian." The inclusion of non-Roman (or not-simply-Roman) peoples in the Roman army was not new, but as they advanced to higher ranks during the third through fifth centuries, the word *barbarus* acquired the additional meaning of "soldier."²⁵ The spread of Christianity in the late Roman Empire added another layer of meaning as *barbarus* came to be applied to those who were not Christian or who followed heterodox forms of Christianity, whatever their ethnic origin.²⁶

Throughout Greco-Roman antiquity, *barbaros* and *barbarus* were multifaceted terms whose meanings were changeable and open to debate. Arguments about who was a barbarian and what it meant to be one were ongoing, {7} always shaped by the political and social concerns of the day. It was not a simple identifier but a way of talking about identity.

Identities: The Conceptual Problem

Discussing identity in the ancient world presents us with problems both conceptual and practical. We deal with many different kinds of identity in modern life: ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, orientation, class, religion, and so on. The lives of ancient peoples were no less complicated than our own. Just as we do, they carried many identities, some visible and others hidden, some fixed and others changing with context. Modern social developments have made identities a topic of widespread discussion and given us a variety of intellectual tools for analyzing them.²⁷ The social context of the ancient Mediterranean was different, and ancient languages did not possess the same scope of terms we use today to discuss our sense of self, but Greeks and Romans were nonetheless aware that identities are made up of many elements that can relate to one another in complicated ways.

One Greek philosopher declared: "I thank fortune for three things: first, that I was born a human, not an animal; second, that I was born a man, not a woman; third, that I was born a Greek, not a barbarian."²⁸ This statement expresses several important ways of approaching identity. First, it recognizes that an individual's identity is made up of many parts, including species, gender, and culture. Second, it notes that different identities carry different social values: in ancient Greece, there were tangible advantages to being a Greek and a man in which women and foreigners did not share. It also lays out a hierarchy of identities, suggesting that being human is more basic to our sense of self than gender, which in turn is more basic than ethnicity. This statement further

suggests that identities derive from our birth, but that they are also in a sense accidental: it is only by chance that any of us has the gender and ancestry that we do and whatever advantages (or disadvantages) go along with them. Although we cannot point to an ancient tradition of “identity theory” equivalent to modern understandings, neither can we treat ancient thinking on the subject as simplistic.

Precisely how to define ethnicity is a subject of ongoing debate. Factors that are commonly considered include real or perceived common ancestry, shared historical experience, common language and traditions, and {8} self-identification as a group.²⁹ All of these factors, even those that seem objective on the surface, rest on subjective judgments. Do we only belong to the communities of our mother tongues or also to those of languages learned later in life? How far back need we go in tracing a common ancestry or shared historical experience? The assertion of an ethnic identity is as much a claim about which standards should be used to measure it as it is about whether an individual or group meets those standards.

Ancient peoples referred to many of these elements when they discussed their own identities. Ancient Greeks were Greeks because they had a common ancestry, spoke the same language, worshiped the same gods, and practiced the same way of life.³⁰ They shared this identity even though they were never politically unified on their own initiative and their common language and culture had many local variants.³¹ Romans could point to many of the same elements making up their Romanness, but Roman culture also recognized the utility of including new peoples in an expanding state. Shared cultural practices carried more weight in an assertion of Romanness than ancestry.³²

Identities can be expressed differently depending on context. A man from the village of Phrearrhoi in southern Attica might identify himself as a Phrearrhian when dealing with people from other parts of Attica, as an Athenian while arguing with Spartans, and as a Greek while addressing the Persian king.³³ Different identities were also readily combined. Athenian Egyptians are mentioned in an inscription that notes they had a temple to the Egyptian goddess Isis in the city.³⁴ In another inscription, from the Roman frontier on the Danube, a soldier identifies himself as both Frankish and Roman.³⁵

Ethnic identity is often entangled with membership in a polity. Ancient societies, like modern ones, had an interest in controlling who was in or out {9} of the group, for such purposes as taxation, military service, access to legal processes, and rights of marriage and inheritance. Greek cities tended to limit access to citizenship, setting requirements such as citizen parents, a minimum property qualification, or special grant under extraordinary circumstances.³⁶ The Roman state cycled through periods of incorporation and exclusivity in the extension of citizenship to the peoples under its rule until 212 CE when citizenship was extended to nearly all free inhabitants of the empire.³⁷ Citizenship came with both privileges and burdens. People might lay claim to a status they were not entitled to or deny one they actually possessed.³⁸ Even those entitled to citizen status might not always display it, such as Saint Paul, who only

declared his Roman citizenship when threatened with torture.³⁹

There were, however, many people who lived under Greek or Roman political authority without the status of citizenship. In Greece, free noncitizens lived in every city-state. Some were granted the status of *metics*, which gave them certain rights and duties short of full citizenship, while others were simply regarded as foreigners. Rome recognized several different grades of status, including *Latins* (who had some legal rights but lacked political rights) and *peregrines* (who were under Roman rule but subject to their own laws). Greek and Roman populations also included significant numbers of slaves, including both those born to slave parents and those who had been captured in foreign wars or imported from abroad.⁴⁰

Ethnic identities thrive on contrast, the awareness that the things we have in common with “our people” make us different from others. This effect can be especially powerful in contexts of conflict and oppression. More powerful groups often use the depiction of the less powerful as a way of defining themselves. Less powerful groups can also use the contrast between themselves and the more powerful as a way of creating points of solidarity to rally around. This kind of self-definition through contrast does not, however, require a power differential, nor does it necessarily arise from conflict. As anyone who has traveled widely knows, we become more aware of the things that are distinctive about our own communities simply through experience with those who are different.⁴¹

{10} Identities: The Practical Problem

Besides the problems involved in the concept of ethnicity, there are also practical problems in knowing how ancient people identified themselves and what national, cultural, or ethnic categories they felt they belonged to. Some individuals either wrote about their own identities or left a sufficient literary record for us to feel confident that we know how they identified themselves, but these are few and largely limited to the same groups who composed the surviving literature: male, wealthy, and of high social status. As for the ways most people thought about their own identities, the evidence we have is much more limited and indirect. The factors we rely on to assign people to ethnic or cultural categories include names, language use, religious practices, ways of life, and the kind of artifacts they used in their daily lives or were buried with after death. All of these types of evidence can be useful, but none is without problems.

Names are unreliable as indicators of identity because people are not necessarily named in accordance with their culture’s traditions. There were, for instance, Greeks who were named after Egyptian pharaohs, including a tyrant of Corinth named Psammetichus and an Athenian vase painter named Amasis.⁴² Further, in the Greek world, it was customary to repeat names in alternating generations, so that a grandson and grandfather might have the same name. Even the state played a role in naming conventions: in the Roman world, when

citizenship was granted to an individual or community, the new citizens customarily adopted elements from the name of the granter. Roman names thus spread into communities where the sense of a Roman identity might in other respects have been very thin. Slaves, of course, could be called whatever their owners liked.⁴³

Because multilingualism was widespread in antiquity and because the use of particular languages was often dictated more by cultural convention and practical need than personal identity, the role of language as a marker of ancient identities is a complicated one. Greek and Latin, the major languages of most of our written sources, were widely used as administrative, trade, and literary languages. Other languages, such as Egyptian, Aramaic, Persian, Etruscan, Punic, Gaulish, and Gothic, were used in certain areas or for certain purposes and not always by native speakers.⁴⁴

{11} Like language use, religious practices were also flexible. A Roman soldier in Britain who identified himself as a German and made an offering to the local British goddess Coventina was doing nothing out of the ordinary.⁴⁵ Many ancient peoples practiced religious syncretism, a tendency to associate other peoples' gods with their own. When writing about or depicting foreign gods, people often called them by the names of their own gods and portrayed them with familiar attributes, which can make it hard to connect religious practices with ethnic groups.⁴⁶ Even the Jews, for whom ethnic identity and religious tradition were more vitally linked than for any other people of the ancient world, adopted some foreign practices as their own.⁴⁷

Artistic depictions of groups or individuals are also problematic. Greek and Roman artists developed a symbolic vocabulary for depicting foreign peoples that could also be employed for purposes having little to do with actual identities. A soft cloth cap, for instance, was a "costume" that could be used both to identify barbarian characters in Greek art and to indicate Greeks who were indulging in "exotic" practices.⁴⁸ Likewise, the image of a bare-breasted barbarian woman in Roman art evokes the mythic Amazons more than it indicates anything about the actual dress or habits of the people in question.⁴⁹ Such images tell us something about the thinking of the artists and their patrons, but little about the people depicted.

Archaeological evidence, such as the remains of personal ornaments and food vessels, can also be difficult to interpret. Like the literary evidence, the surviving archaeological remains are only a fragmentary representation of a living material culture. The evidence we have favors durable materials such as pottery, metal, glass, and stone over more perishable types such as wood, leather, and cloth. Most of the best-preserved materials come from grave finds and may tell us more about funerary customs than about lived culture. Much ink was spilled in previous generations trying to link specific types of artifact to identifiable cultural groups, such that a person buried with a certain type of brooch could be categorically declared a Goth, while a person buried with a different kind of brooch must have been a Frank. More recent research has unsettled such

certainties. It is now clear that few artistic styles and artifact types are {12} culturally limited. Objects and object types passed from one community to another through trade and imitation, while within communities there were variations of personal taste and workshop specializations. We cannot assume that archaeological patterns indicate the boundaries of ethnic identities.⁵⁰

Finally, we have to reckon with the fact that identities are a process, not a passive fact. They are formed, challenged, and reinterpreted. Some parts of our identity are shaped by social forces beyond our control, while other parts are open for individuals and societies to adapt for their own purposes. The myth of Aeneas, which made the Romans heirs of Troy, served the Romans' need to fit themselves into an international Mediterranean culture that privileged Greek stories.⁵¹ Similarly, people construe the identities of others to suit their own needs, as when Julius Caesar declared the people on one side of the Rhine River Gauls and those on the other side Germans to fit the narrative of his military campaigns.⁵²

An example will illustrate some of the challenges we face in trying to interpret the identities of ancient individuals. In the Dakhla Oasis, in the western desert of Egypt, stands the tomb of Petosiris, a local magnate from the period of Roman rule. The tomb is mostly decorated in a local version of traditional Egyptian tomb art, replete with the appropriate symbols of the spirit and eternal life. Petosiris himself, though, is painted in Roman style wearing a Roman tunic and toga holding a scroll, a Roman symbol of office. Two attendants, at smaller scale, approach him with offerings of bread and wine. One is painted in Roman style, turned three-quarters toward the viewer with soft shading on the sides of his face and body. The other is in classic Egyptian style, his body outlined and abstracted. Filling the empty spaces of the scene are a Roman-style grapevine and a text in Egyptian hieroglyphs.⁵³

How are we to identify Petosiris? He had an Egyptian name and a characteristically Egyptian tomb, but in that tomb he had himself painted like a Roman and surrounded by both Roman and Egyptian decorations. His tomb contains text in Egyptian hieroglyphs, but that text was a ritual funerary formula probably reproduced from an artist's copybook. It is hard to see the decoration of Petosiris' tomb—particularly the matched pair of Egyptian/Roman attendants—as anything other than a deliberate assertion of an identity that was both Roman {13} and Egyptian, but in what combination and under what conditions? Did he think of himself as an Egyptian who could put on a good show of being Roman when it was useful to do so, or perhaps as a Roman who respected the Egyptian customs of his neighbors and ancestors? Was he Egyptian at home with his family and Roman in public while carrying out the duties of his office? Was he, as Whitehouse puts it, Roman in life and Egyptian in death? Was he “Roman Egyptian” as a distinct identity, much as “African American” is more than simply the intersection of being American and being African?⁵⁴ Cataloging the {14} elements of Petosiris' ethnic identity is only the beginning of understanding him and his cultural associations, not the end.



{13} Wall painting from the tomb of Petosiris, Dakhla Oasis, Egypt. Petosiris is portrayed on the left (the damage to his face may have been done by later Christians or Muslims who misinterpreted the image as representing a “pagan” god). On the right, two attendants present him with wine and bread, flanking a grape vine.

These are the problems that surround us whenever we attempt to describe interactions among people of different cultures, origins, and ethnicities in the ancient world and that lie behind simple labels such as “Greek,” “Roman,” “Persian,” or “Gaul.” We must remember that these terms are at best a shorthand for more complicated and tenuous constructions. By “Greeks” we mean “Those people who, if you asked them ‘Are you a Greek?’ would have said ‘Yes,’ and would have been accepted as such by most of the other people who also would

have said “Yes.” No such group has ever been homogeneous. The ancient literary record, even coming from so narrow a segment of society as it does, shows us how vehemently those who counted themselves part of the group could disagree with one another about what it meant to be Greek or Roman and where the lines between “us” and “them” should be drawn.

Race

A term that is often used today in discussions of ethnic identity but which will see little use in this book is “race.” The European and American thinkers who developed the modern concept of race over the past several centuries often drew on classical texts and explicitly applied their racial theories to antiquity.⁵⁵ The population of the ancient Mediterranean included people whose origins ranged across Eurasia and Africa. Despite these facts, race, as we understand it today, is not often a useful category for discussing identities and relationships in the ancient Mediterranean.

In modern usage, the concept of race divides humanity into categories defined by certain physical traits, notably skin color. Although race used to be discussed as a biological fact, it is now understood as a social construct. While variations in skin color, skeletal morphology, and other physical features are a fact of human biology, the idea that these variations can be used to divide people into meaningful categories is a cultural invention. What makes a person “black,” “white,” or any other racial designation is not the color of their skin but the existence of social power structures that treat their color as a definitive marker of identity.

While Greek and Roman societies had power structures that privileged some groups over others, these did not generally operate on the same terms that the modern structures of race do. Physical features were not of much importance in assigning people to categories; language, customs, and ways {15} of life were chief among the ways in which groups were described.⁵⁶ The Greek historian Herodotus, for example, arguing that the Colchians of the Black Sea coast were related to the Egyptians, noted that both peoples had dark skin and curly hair, but he dismissed these facts as unreliable. He was instead persuaded of their relation to one another by the evidence that they spoke similar languages, they both practiced circumcision, and they produced linen in the same way.⁵⁷ Ancient authors remarked on variations in skin color, but no more pointedly than they noted differences in hair and eye color and physical size.⁵⁸ In noteworthy contrast to modern racial experience, those of dark skin or African ancestry suffered no special disadvantages in Greek and Roman culture.⁵⁹

Further, race is unhelpful in the discussion of barbarians because of two particular features of the modern European/American conception of race that separate it from ancient ways of classifying individuals and societies. First, modern racial theory assumes that race is innate and immutable; a white person

will always be white and cannot become anything else. Second, modern ideology casts race as strictly hereditary. The child of two black parents cannot be any race but black, and even people of mixed racial heritage can parse their racial identity into specific portions.⁶⁰

Neither of these assumptions about the immutable and inheritable nature of racial identity were common in ancient Greece and Rome. Classical ideas about identity instead allowed for fluidity and ambiguity, on both the individual and societal levels. The last Roman king, Tarquinius Superbus, is an individual example. Though Superbus was identified as Roman, his father, Tarquinius Priscus, was an Etruscan whose own father, Demaratus, was a {16} Greek: in three generations of the same family we find three different ethnic identities.⁶¹ At the other end of Roman history we find Orestes, a provincial Roman who joined Attila's Huns and later made himself *de facto* western Roman emperor. He was succeeded by his son Romulus Augustus, the famed "last Roman emperor," who was soon dethroned by Odoacer, a Goth whose father, Edeco, had been a Hun.⁶² Ethnic identity in antiquity had none of the stability we assume for race today.

The fluidity of ethnic identity applied on the large scale as well. It was commonplace for ancient peoples to invent kinships between themselves and other peoples or between two foreign groups.⁶³ Most famous may be the legend of Aeneas that made the Romans descendants of Trojans.⁶⁴ Romans could also be claimed as the descendants of Greeks.⁶⁵ After the Romans had conquered Gaul, the Gauls began to claim Trojan ancestry.⁶⁶ Britons, after the collapse of the western Roman Empire, called themselves both Trojans and Romans.⁶⁷ Jews claimed the Spartans as their long-lost kin, while the Roman historian Tacitus identified the Jews as descendants of Ethiopian exiles.⁶⁸

Introducing the vocabulary of race into this discussion would confound more than illuminate.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the historians of the past few centuries who have looked back at the ancient world's ideas about barbarians have often had race on their minds. Even if we do not think of ancient peoples in terms of race, we must contend with the fact that many modern historians have done so. We cannot ignore the question of race, but we must take the identities of ancient peoples on the terms in which they understood and represented them.

It may, in fact, be more useful to look in the other direction and apply ancient thoughts on barbarians to the modern concept of race. Because the Western world has long looked back to classical Greek and Roman culture as an intellectual and artistic model, the architects of modern racial ideology often drew on ancient depictions of barbarians both for specific elements of {17} racial stereotypes and for methods of defining identity. By seeing how Greeks and Romans thought about the peoples they interacted with, we may be better able to scrutinize racial thinking in the world today.

Others and Otherness

One of the methods by which ancient authors and artists defined their own identities and those of foreign peoples is through “otherness.” The notion of the barbarian is by its nature connected with this concept, and classical narratives about barbarians are some of the foundational “othering” texts in the Western tradition.⁷⁰

“Othering” means the invention of a narrative that defines some group we do not belong to as a way of defining ourselves. It is both a fundamental psychological process (we identify ourselves by noting the ways in which we are different from others) and part of the creation of a hierarchy of privilege (those who have the power to set the terms of what is “normal” do so by focusing attention on those who are different). Through its stereotypes and stories about what other people are like, a society defines how it thinks of itself.

Anyone who lacks the power to create a culturally dominant narrative is susceptible to othering. The common targets include women, foreigners, ethnic and cultural minorities, lower classes, members of sexual minorities, slaves, those who practice disfavored professions, and so on. The elaboration of otherness often serves to justify systems of inequality by imputing to the suppressed group vices opposite to the virtues most esteemed by the more powerful.⁷¹

Ancient discussions of barbarians often engage in othering. Both Greek and Roman cultures prized rational self-control among the highest virtues, what Greeks called *sōphrosynē* and the Romans *continentia* or *gravitas*.⁷² Accordingly, Greek and Roman authors often highlight a lack of self-control as a characteristic of barbarians, such as when Herodotus recounts the lewd behavior of drunken Persian envoys in the Macedonian court or when the {18} historian Polybius says that “in everything the Gauls did, they were guided by passion rather than reason.”⁷³ These statements tell us little about the actual behavior of Persians or Gauls and instead reflect Greek and Roman ideals. Even in some cases when positive qualities are attributed to barbarians, the purpose is to comment on the failure of the author’s people to live up to their own standards, such as when Tacitus says of the Germans’ strict adherence to marital fidelity: “No one there laughs at vice or calls seductions and love affairs ‘fashionable.’”⁷⁴

We must be alert to the process of othering in accounts of barbarians. It provides us one of the most useful tools with which to dissect Greek and Roman perceptions of outsiders. We must, however, be careful not to apply too vigilant an interrogation of otherness where it is not appropriate. Even the most useful tool can distort our perceptions, like the proverbial hammer that makes everything look like a nail.

Not all descriptions of difference are instances of othering. When observing other cultures, we are often more attentive to the ways in which they are different from us than those in which they are similar.⁷⁵ The differences that Greek and Roman writers observed between themselves and other peoples do not always correspond to important elements of Greek or Roman identity. Herodotus, for instance, was intrigued by many Egyptian customs that he found unusual, from shaving their heads to keeping domestic cats, but neither having hair nor being

catless was an important Greek value.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the differences between peoples need not be conceived in terms of opposites and inversions but can also be approached as variations on a shared practice. Tacitus' descriptions of Germanic political structures make them out to be similar to republican Roman customs, just on a smaller scale.⁷⁷ Even when Greek and Roman descriptions of barbarians tend toward an othering narrative, the simple "us versus them" dichotomy is not always adequate to describe the relationship. Caesar's account of Gaulish and Germanic civilizations positions the Gauls as impetuous and immoderate compared to the Romans, but allows them the rudiments of an organized civilization. His Germans, by contrast, are lawless, violent nomads. Caesar's Gauls and Germans are others to one another as much as either of them is to the Romans.⁷⁸

We should also be careful not to discount the agency and influence of non-Greek and Roman peoples in shaping their own narratives. Herodotus' account of Egyptian history depends on Egyptian informants who had their {19} own agenda in expounding on the glories of their national history to inquisitive foreigners.⁷⁹ Likewise, Tacitus' description of Germanic chiefs who never work but are always ready to fight may well be exactly the image that the warrior aristocrats of peoples along the Roman frontier wished to project of themselves.⁸⁰

Alongside othering and self-describing narratives, a tradition of cultural relativism is also evident in classical literature. This tradition, while it recognized that different peoples had different customs, held that each of those customs was equally appropriate for the people who practiced it. As one of Plato's interlocutors remarks: "We all reply to the stranger who wonders at an unfamiliar sight: 'Do not wonder, stranger; this is our way. Surely in such matters you have your own customs.'"⁸¹

Herodotus illustrates this idea after recounting how the Persian king Cambyses had mocked the Egyptians for worshiping a sacred bull.⁸² To demonstrate how misguided Cambyses was, Herodotus describes an incident at the court of a different Persian king, Darius. Darius asked some Greeks how much money it would take to persuade them to eat the dead bodies of their fathers. The Greeks were horrified and replied that no amount of money would induce them to do so. Darius then asked a group of Kallatai, an Indian people whose custom it was to eat the bodies of their dead parents, how much it would take for them to cremate their deceased, as the Greeks did. The Kallatai were equally horrified and refused to even consider the proposition.⁸³ The image of a Greek invoking Greek and Indian reactions to a Persian in the defense of Egyptian customs against the scorn of another Persian should be enough to caution us against applying simplistic "us versus them" models to all Greek and Roman depictions of foreign peoples.

Barbarians in Modern Scholarship

Until the middle of the twentieth century, Greek and Roman sources were widely taken at face value. Even critical readings of classical texts generally began by assuming the honesty and objectivity of their authors unless {20} contradicted by evidence from other classical texts.⁸⁴ Greek and Roman civilization was elevated as a cultural ideal, and many European and American intellectuals consciously identified themselves with the people of the classical world.⁸⁵ Ancient authors' opinions on other peoples were looked to as authoritative sources, but not with impartial eyes. Every age seeks in history the validation of its own ideals. In the period of European imperialism and the mass enslavement and dispossession of the native peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Americas, many European academics sought justification for these policies in the classics.⁸⁶ Combined with racial "science," a selective and uncritical reading of certain passages in ancient authors supported an overtly racist interpretation of history.⁸⁷

In an age of empires and strict racial divides, scholars tended to think about the past in the same terms that they thought about the present. Ancestry and culture came to be conflated to the point that knowing a people's progenitors was thought to be a sure indicator of their culture and vice versa. A change in material or social culture could be explained only by a change in population, and population change could only result from one people's invasion and conquest of another. As the archaeological exploration of the distant past documented changes in pottery types or burial traditions, waves of invading conquerors were invented to explain them. At one end of Europe, the distribution of languages and changes in artistic style were confidently explained by waves of Celtic migration, while at the other end the collapse of the Mycenaean states in Greece was attributed to a Dorian invasion.⁸⁸

By the middle of the twentieth century, with the appalling consequences of racial "science" and "history" on full display, some of these interpretations were rejected. Others simply shed their most overtly racist trappings but left a legacy of dubious scholarship largely intact. For example, the early twentieth-century {21} "dynastic race theory" of Egyptian history posited that a people of the African continent could never have created an advanced culture on their own, and so the civilization of ancient Egypt must have been imported by foreign conquerors who went on to rule as a racially distinct upper class, prefiguring European colonialism.⁸⁹ After the mid-twentieth century, the racial claims of this theory fell out of favor,⁹⁰ but the claim that fundamental elements of Egyptian civilization were imported from elsewhere, particularly Mesopotamia, lingered much longer.⁹¹

The second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first saw several developments in scholarship on the ancient world that have changed how we think about barbarians. One of those developments is the growth of multicultural awareness that has challenged old assumptions about the unique value of European civilization and its Greek and Roman heritage. Another is the proliferation of models of historical inquiry that bring new methods of critique to classical texts.⁹² At the intersection of these two forces we find the field of

postcolonial studies whose insights into the interactions of colonizing and colonized cultures, both destructive and productive, have been brought to bear on ancient societies as well as modern.⁹³

One of the most important developments in the past half century of scholarship on Greeks, Romans, and barbarians is the recognition that classical authors did not write about foreign peoples with impartial objectivity but rather from within specific cultural contexts and for particular literary and political purposes. Obvious as this understanding may seem from a modern point of view, its acceptance as a scholarly standard has meant a shift away from the received traditions for handling ancient sources and thinking about {22} their implications. The consequences of this scholarly reorientation are still being worked out. Like the breakers rolling into shore from a storm passing far out to sea, many of the individual debates in the current scholarship on Greeks, Romans, and others are the result of reexamining sources whose meaning was thought straightforward a century ago.

Meeting the Barbarians

We are today at an important moment in thinking about the relationships between Greeks and Romans and the other peoples of the ancient Mediterranean world. Modern scholars have largely (though, regrettably, not entirely) shaken ourselves free from the racism and uncritical Eurocentrism of earlier generations.⁹⁴ We have also largely (though, again, not entirely) left behind the idolization of Greek and Roman culture and have come to understand the people of antiquity not as cultural heroes but as people like ourselves: complex, contradictory, and imperfect. In an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world, we are gaining a new appreciation for how interconnected and multicultural the ancient Mediterranean actually was.

Greece and Rome were not lone beacons of civilization. They engaged in movements, struggles, and exchanges that spanned an entire hemisphere. Greeks and Romans were always meeting barbarians: on the battlefield, in the marketplace, and at the dinner table; as enemies, as neighbors, and as partners; in the imagination of poets and in the reality of day-to-day life. From these encounters emerged not a single, settled vision of what it meant to be a barbarian but an ongoing tumble of responses that ranged from contempt to admiration and everything in between.

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61. Livy, *History of Rome* 1.34; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 3.46.

62. *Anonymus Valesianus* 8.38; Rudi Paul Lindner, "What Was a Nomadic Tribe?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24, no. 4 (October 1982): 703; Bruce MacBain, "Odovacer the Hun?" *Classical Philology* 78, no. 4 (October 1983): 323–27.
63. Erich S. Gruen, "Cultural Fictions and Cultural Identity," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974) 23 (1993): 1–14.
64. Virgil, *Aeneid*; Livy 1.1.
65. Heracleides Ponticus, *On the Soul*, fragment in Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Life of Camillus" 22.2; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.31, 41–44, 60, 72, 89.
66. Lucan, *Pharsalia* 1.427–28; Sidonius Apollinaris, *Letters* 7.7.
67. Nennius, *History of the Britons* 10.
68. 1 Maccabees 12:5–23; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 12.225–27; Tacitus, *Histories* 5.2.
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70. On otherness in ancient Mediterranean cultures, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978); François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*; Beth Cohen, ed., *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*; Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity*; L. M. Wills, *Not God's People: Insiders and Outsiders in the Biblical World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).
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72. Plato, *Alcibiades* 1 122; Aristotle, *Virtues and Vices* 1.3–4 (1249b); Cicero, *Philippics* 7.5; Cicero, *Against Catiline* 2.11.
73. Herodotus 5.18–20; Polybius, *Roman History* 2.35.
74. Tacitus, *Germania* 19.
75. Redfield, "Herodotus the Tourist," 24–29.
76. Herodotus 2.36, 66.
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82. Herodotus 3.27–9.
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{23} CHAPTER 2

HOW THE GREEKS BECAME GREEK

On a stormy day in the late 1300s BCE, a merchant ship was running on the wind along the south coast of Anatolia (the Asian part of modern-day Turkey) toward the Aegean Sea. The hold carried luxury goods ranging from a golden scarab inscribed with the name of the Egyptian queen Nefertiti to amber beads from the Baltic Sea. Most of these treasures belonged to the two gentlemen who had hired the ship to take them home to Greece after a successful voyage to Egypt.

Something went wrong. Perhaps the gentlemen, in their haste to get home, had persuaded the captain to set out in bad conditions. Perhaps the weather turned unexpectedly foul. Whatever the cause, the ship was driven against rocky Cape Uluburun and sank with its cargo, not to be seen again until 1982 when a sponge diver discovered it.

The excavation of the Uluburun shipwreck has helped illuminate a network of commerce and diplomacy in the early Mediterranean world with connections as far-flung as Scandinavia and sub-Saharan Africa. The personal effects of the crew show that they were experienced traders with contacts in many ports along the eastern Mediterranean coast between the Aegean Sea and Egypt. The distinctive weapons and gear of the two elite passengers from Greece and the hold full of luxury goods suggest that the ship was sailing on a special mission. Since the goods in the hold are like those in luxury cargoes mentioned in contemporary correspondence between the Egyptian kings and other monarchs in the region, archaeologists suspect that this mission was a diplomatic endeavor to strengthen ties between Egypt and the Aegean.¹

The Uluburun shipwreck illustrates the depth and range of international contact in the eastern Mediterranean of the Bronze Age. The peoples of the Aegean world were diverse in language and culture, and they were connected to a larger world through the movement of people, goods, and ideas. The Greek culture that was formed out of these diverse sources was not a fixed set of traits but an ongoing evolution as elements of “Greekness” were adopted, {24} discarded, transformed, and reconfigured over time. Contacts with the outside world, like those represented by the Uluburun ship, were a crucial part of this evolution.

Greece/Hellas

The ancient people whom we call Greeks did not call themselves Greeks. The English word “Greek” ultimately comes from the name of the small town of Graea in central Greece. Settlers from Graea were among those who founded Cumae, the first Greek colony on the Italian mainland, in the eighth century BCE. When the Romans encountered the settlers at Cumae, they called them *Graeci* (singular *Graecus*), from the many Graeans among the population. In time, *Graeci* became the Latin word for all Greeks, even those with no connection to Graea or Cumae. From Latin, the word eventually came into English.

The earliest written sources in which the Greeks named themselves are the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, attributed to Homer and written down in the eighth century BCE, but based on oral traditions reaching back perhaps as far as the twelfth century. The primary term for the Greeks in the Homeric epics is “Achaean” (*Akkhaioi* or *Akkhaiwoi*), but they are also called “Argives” (*Argeioi*) and “Danaans” (*Danaoi*).² Some non-Greek sources suggest that “Achaean” and “Danaan” were in use as collective names as early as the 1400s BCE. A people called *Tanaju* (perhaps from *Danaoi*) are mentioned in Egyptian sources from the fifteenth century. They appear again in an inscription from the fourteenth century, along with a list of cities that appear to correlate with major Greek centers of the time. Later Egyptian sources mention a northern people called the *Ekwesh*, which may be connected to *Akkhaiwoi* (Achaeans).³ Several documents from the Hittite Empire of eastern Anatolia from the sixteenth through twelfth centuries refer to a western land called *Abhiyawa*, probably mainland Greece or Greek cities on the Aegean coast of Anatolia.⁴ These records suggest that for many centuries before Homer, the people of Greece were known by a variety of names.

By around 700 BCE, a new term had become standard as a common name for the Greeks and their land: they were *Hellenes* and they lived in *Hellas*.⁵ {25} These were not new names. *Hellas* is mentioned in the *Iliad* as a place in northern Greece. Its people, the *Hellenes*, are among Achilles’ contingent of warriors, but the name carries no special meaning in the epics.⁶

We do not know how or why “Hellene” eclipsed earlier words to become the definitive name for the Greeks. The variety of terms in Homer and earlier references suggests that some sense of collective identity existed from an early period, but also that it was variable. Later Greeks were aware that their ancestors had not always used the same name, or any name, to refer to themselves as an ethnic group.⁷ “Hellene” was originally a geographic term, but as the Greeks had increasing contact with the larger world, it came to be a primarily linguistic identifier: the *Hellenes* were the people who spoke Greek, no matter where they came from.⁸

The Origins of the Greek Language

Greek belongs to the Indo-European language family. A language family is made up of languages that are related to each other by descent from an earlier common language, as in the common origins of Spanish, Italian, and Romanian in the Latin language. Indo-European languages have today been spread worldwide as a consequence of Western imperialism and cultural influence, but before the modern era they were spoken across much of Europe and a swath of central and southwestern Asia stretching as far as northern India and western China. The family includes ancient languages such as Sanskrit, Persian, Greek, and Latin, as well as many modern languages, including English, Spanish, Hindi, and Russian.

The earliest Indo-European languages were probably spoken in the vicinity of the Black Sea sometime before 4000 BCE and spread outward from there.⁹ Language changes are difficult to track in preliterate societies. Working backward from the earliest written forms of Greek in comparison with other branches of the Indo-European family, our best estimate is that an ancestor of Greek was spoken in the southern Balkans around 3000 BCE, {26} and an early form of the language began to be used in Greece between 2000 and 1600 BCE.¹⁰

Languages spread in many ways. Conquest can lead to language change, but the results are not always straightforward. Although conquerors sometimes impose their own language on the conquered, they can also adopt the locals' language for themselves. The close interaction of invasive and indigenous languages often registers significant changes in both.¹¹ Mass migration can also lead to language change, but the effects are similarly complicated. Given the difficulties of moving large numbers of people, large-scale movements among sedentary cultures are mostly triggered by serious social disruptions, such as violent conflicts, food shortages, and political upheavals. Those who relocate are usually the less powerful, the less secure, or those on the losing side of internal strife.¹² Some migrants are able to claim positions of power and prestige and bring their languages with them, but many find themselves a disadvantaged minority in their new homes. Economic, social, and political advancement often requires learning the local language. Within a few generations, such migrant populations tend to adopt the languages of their new home, just as immigrants to the United States have done for more than two centuries.¹³

More common than conquest or mass migration is language shift, when a community adopts a new language in place of its previous language.¹⁴ Such shifts often occur in response to changes in political and economic forces. In the British Isles over the past few centuries, for example, many speakers of Cornish, Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, Manx, and Irish Gaelic have adopted English as their primary language because of its economic utility, while at the same time some native English speakers have shifted to these languages in order to assert a cultural identity. Small-scale population movements often accompany language shifts—sometimes as the cause of the social changes that drive the language shift and sometimes as their result—but language shifts can occur without conquest or

large-scale migrations.

The details of how Greek spread through the Aegean remain unclear, but the evidence suggests it was brought to the region by a relatively small {27} number of immigrants whose mastery of horses and chariots gave them a military advantage over the existing elite. They did not necessarily arrive in large numbers or as a single group. Even a few relatively small bands of warriors, by establishing themselves as a new elite class with control of vital resources, could have spread their language throughout Greece.¹⁵ Previous languages survived in numerous loanwords into Greek, among which are place names (including important centers in later Greek history such as Athens, Corinth, and Mycenae), the names of gods and heroes, local plants and animals, and words relating to a variety of skilled crafts, such as building, metallurgy, weaving, sailing, music, and war. These loanwords testify to the sophistication of the existing Aegean culture that Greek speakers came to dominate and eventually be integrated into.¹⁶

Prehistory and the Mycenaeans

Prehistoric Greece gained many crucial technological and cultural innovations from contacts with the Levant (a region encompassing much of the eastern Mediterranean coast) and Mesopotamia. One of the earliest was agriculture, introduced around 6500 BCE. Over the next several millennia, Eastern developments gradually found their way to Greece, including various domesticated plants and animals, mud-brick architecture, and crafts such as pottery and textiles. Bronze-smelting techniques developed in Mesopotamia in the 4000s reached Greece by around 3000.¹⁷

Around 2100 the island of Crete, south of the Greek mainland, saw the development of a more complex culture than any that had existed in southeastern Europe before. This culture was given the name “Minoan” by modern archaeologists, but we do not know what they called themselves. Minoan civilization adopted models of organization from Egypt and the coastal kingdoms of the Levant. The enormous storehouse-palace complexes built on Crete show a society organized around powerful central leaders who collected and redistributed resources, much as the kings of eastern Mediterranean {28} states did.¹⁸ Scribes recorded these transactions in writing (still undeciphered today), another idea imported from abroad. Foreign luxury goods were displayed in Minoan palaces, and Minoan traders and emissaries appear in Egyptian art.¹⁹

Around 1600 BCE a new way of life emerged on the Greek mainland. Archaeologists have dubbed this new culture “Mycenaean” after the hilltop site of Mycenae where its characteristics were first identified. Mycenaean society was highly stratified between a military elite who occupied fortified hilltop palaces and a population of farmers, crafters, traders, and laborers who lived in villages or scattered households across the valleys and coastal plains. There may have been a significant overlap between the Mycenaean elite and the immigrants who brought

the Greek language with them. Mycenaean society also adopted some of the patterns established by the Minoans, with the elite concentrating power through the redistribution of agricultural produce. In other ways, the Mycenaean states were distinct: while Minoan palaces were built close to towns and ports with few defenses, the Mycenaean palaces were elevated fortresses set apart from the farming villages that supported them. In the late 1400s, Mycenaeans seem to have taken over control of most of the Minoan palaces on Crete as well as the Minoans' old role in maritime trade, leading to greater contact between Mycenaean Greece and the ancient kingdoms to the south and east.²⁰ The Minoan writing system known as Linear A was adapted into a similar system, Linear B (deciphered in the 1950s and found to be an early form of Greek), which was employed to record the movement of goods through the Mycenaean palace economies.

Mycenaean society flourished for about five centuries from around 1600 to sometime after 1200. During this period, mainland Greece was divided into a collection of small palace states. At the head of each palace was a king {29} called a *wanax* (plural *wanaktes*), supported by a professional army and a bureaucracy of scribes and subordinate officials, including the *qasireu* who supervised groups of farmers and crafters. Some of those who lived outside the palace were linked to the system, working the wanaktes' fields and filling their storehouses, but others worked for themselves. A religious elite of priests and priestesses also operated outside the palace sphere.²¹ Those who lived in the palaces and those who lived outside them did not necessarily feel that they shared an ethnic identity. The inaccessible locations and high walls of the palaces set the wanaktes and their followers apart, while those in the villages did not widely imitate the artifacts, architecture, and funerary customs that distinguished the palace elite.²²

The strength of each Mycenaean state depended on ties of loyalty between the wanax and those who served him, especially the warriors supported by the palace economy.²³ Part of what bound these soldiers to their leader was the wanax's access to luxury goods that he could bestow as tokens of status. Overseas trade and diplomatic connections were therefore essential to the smooth functioning of Mycenaean society. The scope of this trade is shown by the assemblages of imported luxuries found in Mycenaean burials and by exported Mycenaean artifacts, especially pottery, distributed through the Mediterranean world from Italy to Egypt.²⁴ Goods from beyond Mycenaean society reached both the palaces and the villages of Greece. The wanaktes engaged with the structures of royally directed trade that had long connected the kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean, but private commerce was also able to take advantage of the connections created by palace trade, and crafters at both royal and private levels made goods for export.²⁵ The amber finds in the Uluburun wreck and at Mycenaean sites suggest that the Mycenaeans also {30} profited from linking the Mediterranean with the overland routes that led up to the Baltic.²⁶ In addition to trade goods, Greece was a source of mercenaries for wealthier kingdoms such as Egypt.²⁷

Likewise, outsiders and fragments of their cultures found their way to both the palaces and villages of Greece. Local leaders from Anatolia, under pressure from the Hittite Empire, sought refuge for themselves and their followers in the Mycenaean palaces.²⁸ Immigrants with special skills, such as scribes literate in Hittite, were employed in the palaces.²⁹ Phoenician merchants on the Greek island of Melos worshiped their own gods in a small shrine next to the temple of the local cult.³⁰ Foreign slaves were captured in raids and brought back to Greece or bought from traders.³¹ Certain sword types made by Mycenaean smiths might have been modeled on the weapons of mercenaries recruited from Italy.³²

Contact between Greeks and others in the Mycenaean age was, in most cases, small-scale and periodic. Trade, diplomatic exchanges, and the movement of individuals and small groups brought new goods, people, and ideas into Greece. Elements of Greek culture that took shape in their presence continued to be important in later ages long after the Mycenaean palaces stood empty and abandoned.

The End of the Mycenaean World

Around 1250 BCE a wave of disturbances hit the Mycenaean palaces. Several were burned and abandoned. In many of the remaining palaces, fortifications were strengthened. In the decades after 1200, several more palaces were {31} abandoned or destroyed. By the eleventh century, aristocratic Mycenaean culture had collapsed. The palace-centered elite largely disappeared, and the Linear B writing system was forgotten. Some areas of Greece saw a decrease in population, and the remaining communities mostly dropped out of international trade. The following period, lasting until around 750, has traditionally been known as the Greek Dark Age.

But Greece did not experience a total collapse of society. The Mycenaean aristocracy suffered serious disruption, and there were inevitable ripple effects beyond the palace walls, but at the village level, the routines of farming, small-scale craft production, and local trade carried on. Archaeological evidence once thought to indicate large-scale depopulation is now understood as representing internal relocation and changing settlement types in a society adapting to life without the palaces. While some regions do appear to have seen significant population declines, other areas were growing.³³ Although the *wanaxtes* were gone and even the word *wanax* was never revived as a title, other elements of the Mycenaean system continued. The term *qasireu*, applied to certain Mycenaean officials, became *basileus*, the classical Greek word for aristocrats and kings.³⁴ The hilltop palaces did not remain completely abandoned. Many saw reoccupation and reuse in later centuries, though without the revival of the *wanax*-centered aristocracy.³⁵ The applicability of the term “dark age” has, therefore, been questioned, and the period is increasingly called the Early Iron Age.³⁶

The causes of this disruption to the upper strata of society are unknown. We

do not even know whether the destruction of the palaces was a cause or an effect of their abandonment. Since international connections were so important to maintaining the palace system, however, interruptions in those connections may well have played a part. Increasing commercial trade may have undermined the wanaktes' monopoly on foreign luxuries and upset the relationships that bound wanaktes and their followers together. The fall of a few palaces may have weakened the whole system by casting doubt on the wanaktes' claims to power. Greece was not the only place that experienced disruptions. Long-distance trade and large-scale political structures faltered throughout the eastern Mediterranean in the twelfth century. There may not {32} be a single cause that accounts for the whole collapse of the Mycenaean aristocracy but rather a series of changes in the social and economic landscape that made the system untenable.³⁷

Whatever its causes, the fall of the palaces had far-reaching effects in Greece. While external contacts never entirely stopped, they did become less frequent and less intense. For the next several centuries, Mediterranean trade mostly bypassed Greece. In time, the Etruscans of northern Italy took over the role of linking the Mediterranean and northern European trade spheres; the Baltic amber routes shifted west accordingly.³⁸ There was some emigration from Greece to areas in the eastern Mediterranean, and some displaced Mycenaean warriors may have joined the bands of pirates and raiders known to Egyptians as the "Sea Peoples."³⁹

The society that continued on in Greece was heir to the villages and farmsteads outside the palace walls. These small-scale farmers, herders, and crafters harbored a lingering suspicion of grandiose claims to power. Their leaders were the heads of prosperous households whose homes were large farmsteads, not palaces, and whose bond with their followers was personal, not bureaucratic.⁴⁰ Their priests and priestesses continued to tend sacred spaces, some of which came to include palace ruins. Many of the gods they worshiped had the same names as those worshiped by the Mycenaeans, although the attributes and domains of some gods shifted over time.⁴¹ While the people of the region stopped using the Linear B writing system, they continued to speak dialects of Greek. When the Greeks learned to write again in the 700s, they were still calling themselves Achaeans and Danaans, the same names reflected in Hittite and Egyptian sources of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Myths of Invasion and Migration

Until the second half of the twentieth century, most scholarship assumed that the cultural transformations that accompanied the rise and fall of the {33} Mycenaean palaces represented the mass migrations of new populations who displaced the local people.⁴² Where exactly the invaders who became the Mycenaeans had originally come from was a matter of great debate.⁴³ Some scholars argued that they were Minoans from Crete who had conquered the

mainland.⁴⁴ Some posited that the invaders were Aryans.⁴⁵ (Today the term “Aryan” is only properly applied to certain peoples of the Iranian plateau and northern India, but in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was used for an imagined superior white Nordic race believed to be ancestral to several peoples in Europe and parts of Asia.) Others believed the invaders were from various parts of southwestern Asia,⁴⁶ while still others looked to Egypt or elsewhere in Africa.⁴⁷ There was also scholarly debate as to just how the newcomers had dealt with the indigenous people: had they melded into a single new culture, created an ethnically stratified society, or simply eliminated the previous inhabitants?⁴⁸ While there was no scholarly consensus on where the invaders had come from or what they did when they got to Greece, that there had been an invasion was not in doubt.

The scholarship of the period had rather more consensus about what had brought the Mycenaean age to an end: the Dorians. Ancient Greek had several different dialects, one of which, Doric, was widely spoken in a crescent extending from the Peloponnese across Crete to the southwestern coast of Anatolia during the classical period. Doric speakers tended to share other distinctive cultural traits, including traditional social divisions and religious observances. From the nineteenth to the late twentieth century, it was widely believed that these Doric speakers were the remnants of a Dorian people {34} who had invaded Greece around 1200 and obliterated the Mycenaean kingdoms.⁴⁹ While the origin of the Mycenaeans was hotly debated, the consensus on the Dorians was that they were warlike Indo-European speakers from the north, of pure Aryan stock.⁵⁰

Modern scholarship has rejected most explanations of early Greek history that rely on large-scale invasions, but one version has regained popularity in recent decades. Although this theory also has its roots in the nineteenth century, it is best known today in the form put forward by Martin Bernal in *Black Athena*.⁵¹ Bernal argues that ancient Greek civilization was the product of repeated conquest and colonization of Greece by Egyptians and Phoenicians. In particular, he argues that the Mycenaeans were Hyksos conquerors. The Hyksos were traditionally identified as a people from the Levant who invaded Egypt and occupied an independent kingdom in the Nile delta from the mid-seventeenth to mid-sixteenth century BCE, later to be defeated and expelled by the resurgent Egyptians.⁵² Bernal argues that the Hyksos were a conglomerate of mostly Israelites and Phoenicians with some Indo-European speakers, and that on expulsion from Egypt they traveled around the Mediterranean coast to invade Greece, transplanting their Egyptianized culture and laying the foundation of Greek civilization.⁵³

Since no written sources document the beginning or end of the Mycenaean world, two principal types of evidence are called upon to advance all these theories: mythology and archaeology. Myth-based arguments rely on a selection of tales about wandering heroes and foreign founders of Greek cities recorded in classical and postclassical literature, which have been reinterpreted as distorted recollections of historical population movements. For those who like to see

Mycenaeans as Asian or African, there are the stories of Cadmus, a Phoenician prince who founded the city of Thebes, and Danaus, an Egyptian who fled his homeland with his fifty daughters and found a {35} welcome in Argos.⁵⁴ Those who favor an Anatolian origin point to Pelops, a Lydian, Phrygian, or Paphlagonian (depending on the story) who made his kingdom in the Peloponnese.⁵⁵ The Dorians are generally connected with the descendants of Heracles who were exiled from the Peloponnese only to return generations later to reclaim their birthright.⁵⁶ Some legends also referred to a people called the Pelasgians who had lived in Greece before the Greeks arrived.⁵⁷

Interpreting the myths of Cadmus, Danaus, Pelops, Heracles' descendants, and others as memories of ancient population movements ignores the complexity of the sources and the flexibility of mythology. Greek mythology, like any primarily oral tradition, can be wildly inconsistent about the identities, origins, and fates of characters. There is no canonical text of "Greek mythology." The stories that we know best represent only particular versions that were popular in certain places and times. Because of the cultural influence of Athens, Athenian versions of stories tend to dominate the surviving sources. Many of the stories that connect Greek cities with foreign founders were composed in Athens after the Greco-Persian Wars of 490–479 BCE. In earlier and non-Athenian versions of their stories, Greek cities are only rarely and inconsistently connected with foreign peoples.⁵⁸ The fact that the Athenians, who frequently claimed that their ancestors had sprung from the soil of Attica itself, emphasized the foreign origins of their major rivals such as the Thebans, Spartans, and Argives tells us more about the politics of Greece in the fifth century than about population movements more than a thousand years before.⁵⁹

Like the evidence of mythology, the archaeological record requires scrutiny. There are, indeed, noticeable changes in architectural style and pottery {36} types at the beginning and end of the Mycenaean period, but there are better explanations for those changes than the mass invasion of new peoples. It would be startling if the rise and fall of the palace aristocracy with its redistributive economy and trade connections had not affected material culture. As the pottery market expanded from modest village households to palatial halls and an international luxury market, then contracted again, changes in technique and style were only natural. International exposure also brought new ideas into the Mycenaean repertoire, but they were incorporated into an evolving artistic tradition, not imposed in its place.⁶⁰ The same goes for changes in building styles with the rise and fall of the palaces and their hilltop fortifications.⁶¹ Like other facets of Mycenaean society, material culture was a development of local traditions stimulated by aristocratic demand selectively incorporating foreign elements, not a wholesale import.⁶²

Theories that invoke mass migration as the cause of cultural change rest on an assumption that human populations have inherent cultural tendencies and temperaments that can be discerned from one another and attributed to specific genetic stocks. This assumption was widespread in the nineteenth century when

Romantic nationalism sought to uncover “pure” ancient origins for European nations. Historians and scientists alike strove to delineate the essential qualities of various peoples and demonstrate their continuity over time. (And where such cultural features could not be found they were fabricated, in forms as varied as the Gaelic folk poetry of Ossian and the primordial Englishman buried with his cricket bat at Piltdown.)⁶³ Wherever history and archaeology showed people speaking a new language, making new kinds of pottery, or living in new kinds of houses, the only permissible explanation was that the previous people had been replaced by a new people bringing their own distinctive culture with them. If the later culture preserved some features of the earlier, that was a sign of a remnant of the indigenous inhabitants surviving under the new regime.⁶⁴ Such interpretations sat easily {37} with the imperialist politics of the era and prevailing beliefs about race and the relative merit of different human populations.

For those scholars who claimed an Aryan origin for their own peoples, the myth of the Dorians had a special appeal.⁶⁵ According to prevailing theories, the descendants of those Dorians had gone on to create classical Greek culture and the works of art, architecture, literature, and philosophy that had traditionally been lauded as the pinnacle of European civilization. Northern European scholars who believed in the Aryan origins of the Dorians could lay claim to a piece of that legacy. Indeed, they could paint themselves as truer heirs to the ancient Greeks than even the modern Greeks, whose ancestry had been muddled with Macedonians, Romans, Slavs, and Turks.⁶⁶ Bernal’s *Black Athena* depends on the same assumptions and engages in a similar search for “pure” national origins.⁶⁷ Indeed, Bernal is explicit that he entertains no mechanisms of cultural change other than invasion.⁶⁸

Most modern scholarship has rejected the urge to attribute social and cultural change only to mass migrations. We now acknowledge that cultural changes happen for many reasons and that the migration of small groups of people can have visible effects on the culture they move into without replacing it.⁶⁹ Neither the rise nor the fall of the Mycenaean palaces can be reliably connected with a major shift in the population of Greece, but the absence of a sound invasion theory does not mean that Mycenaean society arose in isolation. The peoples of Greece had long been in contact with a larger world. The movement of merchants, laborers, mercenaries, skilled crafters, slaves, refugees, and nomads was a normal part of life, and as they traveled they brought {38} goods, ideas, words, and memories with them, just as travelers and migrants do today.⁷⁰ The appearance and disappearance of the Mycenaean aristocracy may seem sudden in archaeological time, but in lived experience it was just part of the changing fabric of life in the Aegean world.

The Beginnings of Greece

Greece was not the creation of a single people standing alone and apart from the world. Throughout the history of Greece, people, goods, and ideas from the larger world all became part of an evolving culture. Dramatic cultural changes and social upheavals occurred in which foreign ideas and connections were deeply involved. The people of the Aegean adopted a language whose roots lay to the north while their elite adopted a way of life modeled on examples from the south and east. Trade and diplomatic connections linked them into networks stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Nile valley and from central Asia to the western Mediterranean. The palace aristocracies were so deeply involved with international trade that the faltering of one doomed the other.

At the same time, Greece did not receive these influences passively. Mycenaean palaces were not replicas of Minoan exemplars but adaptations of the Minoan model to fit a Mycenaean way of life. The wanaktes who ruled from those palaces did not just imitate the administration of the Egyptian pharaohs with whom they traded but crafted their own versions of centralized monarchy to suit their own needs. When the people of the Aegean world began to speak an Indo-European language, they filled it with their own words for the things that mattered to them.

Long before they thought of themselves as Hellenes, bound together by their common language and traditions, the people of Greece were crafting the elements of an identity built on engagement with a larger world and the selective adaptation of foreign ideas. By the height of the Mycenaean age, we can discern some of the shared cultural traits that would come to define Greek identity, but those traits were conceived among a diverse population with links to many other peoples and cultures. While later Greeks would eventually define themselves by dividing the world between Greeks and barbarians, it was experience with the “barbarian” world that first made the Greeks Greek.

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THE GREEKS ENCOUNTER THE WORLD

In India, reports the fifth-century Greek historian Herodotus, there are ants larger than foxes. They burrow in the ground casting up gold dust, which the Indians collect.¹ What are we to make of such an outlandish story? Is Herodotus pulling our legs? Or, perhaps, did someone pull his?

As it turns out, there are burrowing animals in northern India who bring up gold dust from the soil—they just aren't ants. Himalayan marmots create sandy hills where gold flecks can sometimes be found.² Herodotus, unfamiliar with marmots, referred to them with the word for the burrowing creatures he knew, ants, in much the same way that Greeks encountering large reptiles for the first time in Egypt called them “crocodiles,” a word originally used for small gecko-like lizards native to Greece.³

But Herodotus' gold-digging ants were also part of a larger narrative. Like most contemporary Greeks, Herodotus imagined the physical world as a large circle with Greece in the middle.⁴ The most precious goods, he asserted, such as gold, tin, amber, and ebony, were to be found at the edges of this circle, while Greece, in the center, was poor.⁵ Herodotus made a connection between the poverty of the Greeks and their victory in the wars with Persia in the early fifth century. Being poor in material goods, the Greeks valued personal qualities such as courage, discipline, and ambition. The Persians, whose homeland was not far from India, were accustomed to wealth. Herodotus drew attention to the comparison with a Spartan's joke, on contrasting the richness of a Persian dinner with the simplicity of a Spartan meal, that the Persian king was a fool to have come to Greece to rob them of their poverty.⁶ In another incident, he portrayed the incredulity of the Persians on learning that Greeks in the Olympic Games competed not for money but simply for {40} honor.⁷ As whimsical as the gold-digging ants might seem, they played a role in constructing an image of the world that confirmed the unique status of the Greeks.

From the eighth to the fourth century BCE, the Greek world experienced enormous transformations and was deeply shaped by encounters with the outside world. These encounters took many different forms. Some were violent confrontations, like the wars between Greeks and Persians. Others were peaceful,

like Herodotus' travels as he conducted his research. Greek reflections on these encounters are similarly varied. Sometimes barbarians appear in Greek literature as stereotyped others; other times they are depicted with nuance and realism. Often, these different modes are hard to disentangle from one another: Herodotus was a conscientious observer who tried to get his facts right, but he still made those facts fit the story he wanted to tell about his own people. As Greeks interacted with the larger world, they played many different roles and had many different reactions.

Trade and Transformation

After the collapse of the Mycenaean palaces, Greece mostly dropped out of contact with the larger Mediterranean world. Greece was never entirely isolated, as shown by the small quantities of trade goods that continued to reach a few settlements, but without the demands of the palace economies, there was little incentive to pursue risky trading ventures abroad.⁸ Memories of the Mycenaean world and its foreign contacts faded into legend. From the 1100s to the 700s BCE, most communities in Greece were connected primarily to their neighbors.

Some of these neighboring communities adopted Greek customs and language. In the regions of Aeolia and Ionia, on the Aegean coast of Anatolia, local peoples began to speak Greek and adopt Greek social and material culture as early as the tenth century. By the seventh century, the peoples of these regions were widely regarded as Greeks. Legends about mass migrations from mainland Greece were invented to explain their relationship to other Greeks. Modern research has found no evidence for more than small-scale Greek migration across the Aegean in the Iron Age. Ionian and Aeolic cultures were instead early examples of a phenomenon that was later widely repeated across the Mediterranean: the merging of small Greek settler communities and local peoples into a hybrid culture that blended Greek and non-Greek traditions.⁹

{41} The period from around 750 BCE to the end of the Greco-Persian Wars in 480 is conventionally termed “archaic.” The following period, to the death of Alexander the Great in 323, is known as “classical.” In many respects, the developments of the classical period were continuations of ideas and practices begun in the archaic.¹⁰

As discussed in Chapter 2, current evidence no longer supports the belief that the end of the Mycenaean age saw a drastic decrease in population. Similarly, we can no longer suppose a population explosion in the eighth century. Instead, changes in settlement patterns and land use suggest gradual but sustained long-term population growth.¹¹ This growth did not cause a crisis of overpopulation, but increasing competition for resources strained the communal ties of early archaic society.¹² By the late 700s, some Greeks were venturing abroad, often as pirates and coastal raiders. The major power in the eastern Mediterranean was the Assyrian Empire, and the first mention of the Greeks in Assyrian sources shows

them engaged in this sort of raiding. A letter from a provincial governor to the Assyrian king dated to the 730s reports:

The Ionians came and attacked the cities of Samsimuruna, Harisu and [?]. A cavalryman came to the city of Dana[bu] (to report this). I gathered up the available men and went (after them). (The Ionians) did not get anything. When they saw my troops they got into their boats and [disappeared] into the middle of the sea.¹³

A later mention of the king sending a fleet to attack the Ionians and suppress their raiding, in 715, suggests that this raid was not an isolated incident.¹⁴

Over the following centuries, Greeks found many ways of engaging with the larger world. Adventurous warriors soon found mercenary service more profitable than raiding.¹⁵ Other kinds of professionals, such as artists, crafters, entertainers, courtesans, and physicians, began seeking patronage in the {42} kingdoms of the Levant. The Persian Empire, which replaced the Assyrians as the major power in the region in the sixth century, was especially welcoming to skilled Greeks, such as Aspasia, a courtesan from the Ionian city Phocaea, and Zenon, a dancer from Crete, who were both favored by the Persian king Artaxerxes II.¹⁶

As trade recommenced and the Aegean became more prosperous, some foreigners found opportunities in Greece as well. As early as the ninth century, Phoenician traders were using a shrine at Kommos in southern Crete, and some sixth-century inscriptions from Lemnos may document a small Etruscan merchant community.¹⁷ By the fourth century there were temples to both the Egyptian goddess Isis and the Thracian goddess Bendis in Athens.¹⁸ Sometime between the fourth and second centuries, a Phoenician was commemorated in Athens with a bilingual Greek/Phoenician gravestone.¹⁹

Powerful individuals attached themselves to international networks of patronage and influence, such as the Athenian aristocrat Alcmaeon who reportedly owed his great riches to the kings of Lydia.²⁰ Others pursued lives away from Greece, such as the Corinthian Demaratus who married into Etruscan nobility and whose son and grandson became kings of Rome.²¹ The volatility of Greek politics forced some to seek sanctuary abroad, as many Greek politicians did in the Persian court, including the Athenians Hippias and Themistocles and the Spartan king Demaratus.²² People at the lower end of the social scale also traveled, though not always willingly. Like many other economically underdeveloped regions at the margins of wealthier societies, early archaic Greece probably supplied unskilled laborers to the eastern {43} Mediterranean, many of them as slaves.²³ Later, as trade brought increasing wealth, Greece became a major importer of slaves.²⁴

By the early eighth century, Mediterranean trade was reviving from its Iron Age slump. Phoenician merchants established a trading base on Cyprus in the 800s from which they traveled to the western Mediterranean.²⁵ Greek and Phoenician traders appear to have formed productive relationships as Greek

traders came on the Mediterranean scene in the eighth and seventh centuries.²⁶ By the sixth century, Greeks were deeply involved in trade routes spanning the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Greek amphorae, coarse pottery vessels for transporting liquid goods such as wine and olive oil, are found in early deposits around the eastern Mediterranean coast, and later in increasing numbers in the west.²⁷ Greek merchants bought large quantities of Egyptian grain, paying for it primarily in silver from Greek, Thracian, and Macedonian mines.²⁸ Etruscans collected fine Greek pottery with such enthusiasm that some Greek potters began imitating traditional Etruscan pottery types and decorations to better serve the market.²⁹

The reopening of foreign contacts had deep effects on Greek life. The Greek climate was poorly suited to growing grain but excellent for producing wine and olive oil. As Greek traders found markets for these commodities, basic foodstuffs were increasingly sought overseas rather than grown at home.³⁰ Trade created new sources of wealth and disrupted existing social structures. Entrenched aristocratic families could no longer monopolize power and patronage. At the same time, scattered communities were coming together to form new urban centers—partly to better take advantage of trade routes—creating the *poleis* (singular *polis*) or city-states that became central to Greek life.³¹

{44} The backbone of this new way of life was a class of independent small farmers and crafters who achieved modest prosperity through trade. The poet Hesiod, around 700, spoke for this emerging class in his poem *Works and Days*, whose practical advice on how to get by as a farmer included notes on ship lading and sailing seasons.³² In many Greek cities, the growing farmer/crafter class backed the ascendancy of men who seized sole power and suppressed the traditional aristocracy.³³ The word “tyrant,” *tyrannos*, applied to these rulers, does not imply that they were bad or vicious, only that the concentration of power in one man’s hands was novel. So, too, was the word. Since no double *n* occurs naturally in the phonetics of ancient Greek, *tyrannos* must be a loanword.³⁴ Like the word, the concept was probably also imported from a people who lived under a monarch. Indeed, the earliest usage of the word connects it with the king of Lydia.³⁵ The idea may have been brought back to Greece by merchants trading in the eastern Mediterranean or by mercenaries returning home after service with a foreign king.³⁶ Although tyrants enjoyed success in many Greek cities for a time, their support base in most *poleis* soon tired of them and ousted them—as the Athenians did to Hippias—in favor of some form of participatory government.

Contact with the outside world was vital to the changes that happened in Greek society between 750 and 323 BCE. That outside contact came in many forms: merchants worked trade routes, individuals of all social ranks from slaves to aristocrats moved in and out of Greece, and farmers and crafters alike responded to the demands of an international market. One of the most important venues for complex, deep, and long-term interactions between Greeks and others was in the colonies.

Colonies and Contacts

In the seventh and sixth centuries, dozens of new Greek communities were founded around the Mediterranean and Black Seas as established poleis in Greece, known as “founding cities” or “mother cities,” sent small contingents of their people abroad to start new settlements. Trade was an obvious motive for some. The Phoenicians had already established trading bases around {45} the Mediterranean, including their major settlement at Carthage. Some Greek colonies were similarly planted near resource-rich zones and nodes of exchange in the west and north, while others were established near centers of commerce in the empires of the south and east. The two earliest Greek colonies, founded around 700, represent these kinds of connections. Pithecusae, on a rocky island off the western coast of Italy, was well situated to trade with the Etruscans of northern Italy, who controlled not only Italian iron sources but also the trade routes to northern and western Europe. Al-Mina, by contrast, was not a new settlement but a Greek neighborhood attached to a Syrian trading town at the mouth of the Orontes River.³⁷

It is unlikely that trade explains all Greek colonies, however. The disruption of family and communal ties, the upheavals of politics, and the stresses of resource competition must have made life in the poleis uncomfortable for many people. Emigration has often served as a release valve for such pressures. For example, in the aftermath of a long regional war, political exiles founded the lone Spartan colony, Tarentum (modern Taranto), in southern Italy.³⁸ Herodotus’ account of the founding of Cyrene, on the Libyan coast, hints at factional conflicts in the founding city, Thera, but is explicit that internal disputes later led some Cyrenaeans to found a secondary colony at Barke.³⁹

There was no standard pattern for colonies. While most began with a small group of founding families, some remained small while others such as Tarentum, Syracuse (in Sicily), and Massilia (modern Marseilles, in southern France) grew into large cities. Some were independent communities while others were Greek immigrant neighborhoods in foreign cities.⁴⁰ Some remained closely bound to their founding cities while others cut their ties.⁴¹ The nature of Greek interactions with non-Greeks in the colonial sphere was similarly varied.

Unlike the spread of modern European colonialism in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, Greek colonies did not represent the vanguard of an expansionist empire but were small, mostly self-sustaining communities.⁴² They did not possess advanced military technologies or carry diseases to which the natives lacked immunity. Some colonies—notably Syracuse, Byzantium, {46} and Heracleia on the Black Sea—were powerful enough to subdue the local population and reduce them to a status near slavery, but this arrangement was not typical. Greek colonies mostly reached some degree of accommodation with local peoples.⁴³

In the east, where large, powerful states dominated the landscape, Greek colonies were only possible within the limits set by the ruling powers, such as Al-

Mina in Syria or Naukratis in Egypt.⁴⁴ Even in areas where the local peoples were not as highly organized, Greek colonies often fit themselves into existing power relations rather than dominating them. At Spina, in northern Italy, a small Greek trading post was attached to an Etruscan town. The fact that only twenty of some two hundred documented inscriptions from the site are in Greek shows that the Greeks did not overrun the local population.⁴⁵ The town of Olbia on the north shore of the Black Sea appears to have merged with a nearby native settlement. The resulting Greco-Scythian town paid tribute to Scythian kings.⁴⁶ The foundation legend of Massilia says that the leader of the Greek settlers married the daughter of a local Gaulish king, illustrating another way immigrants could integrate themselves into local power structures (although later relations with the locals were more hostile).⁴⁷

The history of Greek settlement in Egypt demonstrates the complexity of colonial interactions. In the late 600s BCE, Egypt was under Assyrian dominion. An Egyptian noble, Psammetichus, had been appointed as governor, but when the Assyrians were distracted by internal conflicts, Psammetichus raised a rebellion, bolstered by mercenaries from Ionia and Caria, a region of southwestern Anatolia. When the fighting was done and Psammetichus had become king of a newly independent Egypt, he settled the remaining mercenaries in the Nile delta.⁴⁸ These settlements also attracted other foreigners, such as Phoenician crafters who made imitation Egyptian artworks on the site for export.⁴⁹

The mercenaries remained in Egyptian service, and it appears their descendants did as well, since some were deployed to southern Egypt under Psammetichus II decades later. One such band carved graffiti on the temple of Abu Simbel to commemorate their adventures: “When King Psammetichus came {47} to Elephantine, this was carved by the companions of Psammetichus, son of Theocles, who sailed beyond Kerkis as far as the river went.”⁵⁰ The mercenary Psammetichus was evidently named after the pharaoh by his Greek father. Some families went beyond names and embraced Egyptian culture, as shown by the burial of Wahibre-em-akhet, whose name and hieroglyph-inscribed sarcophagus are conventionally Egyptian; the only clue to his foreign ancestry are the Greek names of his parents, Alexicles and Zenodote.⁵¹ Other soldiers left graffiti at Abu Simbel in Carian and Phoenician, another testament to the cultural and linguistic diversity of those traveling and trading around the Mediterranean at this time.⁵²



Sarcophagus of Wahibre-em-akhet, son of Alexicles and Zenodote, currently in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, Netherlands.

Sometime after 570, the pharaoh Amasis reorganized the Nile delta settlement. Land was granted for the construction of a Greek colony, which, unusually, was collectively founded by nine Greek cities from the coast of Anatolia. Representatives from these cities jointly governed the new community now called Naukratis. Greek ships were banned from landing anywhere else in Egypt for trade.⁵³ The colony thus became the primary site of {48} exchange between Greeks and Egyptians.⁵⁴ Trade connections brought people of many different backgrounds to Naukratis and connected its people to a wider world. One visitor was Charaxos, the brother of the poet Sappho, who traded wine from his home polis Mytilene to Naukratis. He met a slave courtesan there, a Thracian woman named Rhodopis who had been brought to Egypt by her Samian owner. Charaxos fell in love with Rhodopis, bought her, and freed her, after which she chose to remain in Naukratis to ply her trade. To celebrate the fortune she had amassed in her work, Rhodopis later made a rich dedication at Delphi in Greece.⁵⁵ A hieroglyphic inscription on a stele erected by the pharaoh Nectanebo in the fourth century, dedicating revenues from Naukratis to the temple of Neith, shows that the pharaohs kept an active interest in the administration of the colony.⁵⁶ Naukratis retained its importance and trading privileges after the Persian Empire conquered Egypt in 525. It continued to welcome not only traders but also tourists and other travelers, such as Herodotus, who visited Egypt and whose writings record the existence of a local industry of tour guides and interpreters.⁵⁷ The Greeks who settled in Egypt did not exist in isolation but had productive relationships with traders, artisans, and the ruling class alike.

The interactions in and around Naukratis are a window into the complexity of the colonial world. There were Greeks trading with Egyptians, but also Phoenicians making knockoffs of Egyptian art, Greeks assimilating into Egyptian culture, Thracians and Carians negotiating the needs of Egyptian and Greek patrons, and Egyptians making a living off showing the wonders of their country to curious foreigners. Interactions like these were happening all around the Mediterranean. There is no simple way to describe Greek relations with non-Greek peoples in the archaic and classical periods because those relations were never simple.

Greeks Consider the World

Greek responses to cross-cultural interactions were as complex as those interactions themselves. Certain conventional narratives emerged early in Greek literary and artistic responses to their contact with the outside world, but these narratives were widely varied and do not make up a coherent Greek {49} view on what foreign peoples were like. Othering narratives could portray non-Greeks as anything from effeminate cowards to brutish cannibals. On the other hand, barbarians could also be depicted as sources of wisdom or exemplars of utopian societies. It was equally possible to see outsiders as just ordinary folks with

achievements and flaws equal to those of the Greeks. All these narratives could be deployed for rhetorical, philosophical, and literary effect, and none should be assumed to represent a “truer” picture of Greek attitudes toward foreign peoples than any other.⁵⁸

It is no coincidence that the earliest surviving works of Greek literature, the Homeric epics, come from the time when Greek contact with the outside world was accelerating. The *Iliad*, composed in the mid-700s, seems to indicate very little awareness of the outside world. Hardly anything marks the Trojans as different from the Greeks; they speak the same language, worship the same gods, and follow the same heroic code. The *Odyssey*, composed some decades later, is full of awareness of foreign peoples, from the Egyptians and Phoenicians to the fantastical Laestrygonians and Lotus-eaters. It has been suggested that the two poems are a kind of “before and after” portrait of Greeks becoming aware of a larger world and creating a sense of collective identity in response.⁵⁹

The *Iliad*, however, is not so unaware of foreignness as it seems. The subtle emphasis on the diversity, wealth, and effeminacy of the Trojans’ allies—conventional stereotypes of the East—show that Greeks were already experimenting with ways of depicting outsiders.⁶⁰ The *Odyssey* can also be seen less as the product of expanding contact than of aristocratic anxieties in an age of transformation. Among the epic’s main concerns are the fragility of the codes of behavior that govern social relations, especially in foreign lands, and the proper behavior of travelers, guests, and hosts. Odysseus’ son Telemachus, for instance, is shown as heroic when he sets out to visit other aristocrats in search of news about his father, but the Phoenicians who venture abroad for trade are depicted as greedy and dishonest.⁶¹ Both of the epics represent an aristocratic elite reasserting the importance of its own values in the face of social upheaval.⁶²

{50} Different attitudes toward outsiders come through in lyric poetry, which generally embraced the luxury and indulgence associated with Greece’s neighbors such as Lydia. Sappho, whose brother was trading wine to Egypt, uses Lydian soldiers and chariots as images of beauty.⁶³ The poet Archilochus speaks of being a mercenary soldier “just like a Carian.”⁶⁴ Anacreon sighs after a Thracian courtesan.⁶⁵ Not all lyrics are kind: Archilochus mocks a companion’s uncouth manner by comparing her with a Phrygian or Thracian drunkard.⁶⁶ The lyric poets’ assumption that their audience will grasp the beauty of Lydian chariotry or the boorishness of Phrygian drinking conveys a sense of familiarity: while the epics hold barbarians at a distance, lyrics bring them close.⁶⁷

Foreign ideas passed into the visual arts in the archaic period as well. Early archaic Greek art developed a style, known as “Orientalizing,” in which images and motifs from eastern Mediterranean traditions were adopted and recombined with existing Greek forms and techniques. While some elements may have been learned just from exposure to trade goods, other developments point to much deeper engagement between Greek and non-Greek artists. For example, before the archaic age, Greeks had no tradition of large-scale stone statuary. Then, rather suddenly, the form appears in the mid-600s with the *kouroi* and *korai* (singular

kouros and *korè*), sculptures of young men and women standing upright in stiff postures. The form derives from Egyptian funerary statues, whose formal poses had religious meanings in Egypt. The means by which Greek artists learned the techniques and stylistic features of such stone statuary are unclear, but mastering such complex stone-working methods required more than casual contacts and imitation.⁶⁸ Greek art did not simply copy foreign models. Early kouroi imitated Egyptian statues, but since Greeks did not share Egyptian funerary beliefs, they had no reason to keep reproducing Egyptian forms and poses. Greek sculpture soon {51} began experimenting with new ways of depicting the human body and new uses for those depictions.



Fig. 1 Early Egyptian portrait sculpture of a male figure (c. 2600-2500 BCE), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York/Baltimore.

Note how the Greek sculpture uses many of the same features as the Egyptian: the frontal pose with the left foot advanced, the arms straight at the sides, and the hands closed in loose fists.

Greeks also adopted foreign religious and mythological ideas. Some of Odysseus' fantastical wanderings may have been inspired by the Mesopotamian {52} legend of Gilgamesh.⁶⁹ The Greek god Asclepius, a healer who was also associated with dogs, may have been influenced by the Babylonian healing goddess Gula, who was also the patroness of dogs. Asclepius' name may even come from Gula's title *azugallatu*, or "great physician."⁷⁰ Greeks adopted the originally Persian idea of four ages of humanity, associated with four metals marking a descent from primordial virtue to a contemporary age of corruption and violence: gold, silver, bronze, and iron.⁷¹ As with Egyptian sculpture, Greeks not only imported these ideas but adapted them to their own purposes. The system of four metallic ages, for instance, made no room for the heroes of Greek myth whose time was customarily placed a few generations in the past, so Greek poets invented a fifth age, the age of heroes, and inserted it between bronze and iron.⁷²

As Greek experience of the larger world became deeper and more complex, so did Greek artistic and intellectual responses to that world. The sailors who traveled the Mediterranean trade routes and the colonists who interacted with local peoples built up a store of geographic and ethnographic knowledge, much of it passed down orally. The first person to attempt to systematize this knowledge in writing was Hecataeus of Miletus in the later sixth century. His work is now mostly lost, but he inspired other authors to attempt to explain the world and its history in Greek terms. Their work preserves many of the myths, folk tales, and bits of popular wisdom that must have characterized common Greek knowledge of the world in the sixth and fifth centuries. Hellanicus of Lesbos, for instance, tells this story about how Italy got its name:

When Heracles was driving the cattle of Geryon back to Argos, a calf capered off from the herd in Italy, fled down the shore, and swam across to Sicily. Whenever Heracles asked the local inhabitants if they had seen the calf he was seeking, since they knew little of the Greek tongue, they answered in the speech of their country. They called the calf *vitulus*, which is the word still used today. He called the country through which he had chased the calf *Vitulia*.⁷³

This legend shows not only a sensitivity to the problems of communicating across language barriers but also local knowledge of southern Italy: the {53} connection between *vitulus* ("bull") and *Italus* ("Italian") comes from Oscan, a southern Italian language, and Oscan-speakers later used the bull as a symbol of Italian unity. At the same time, this story assimilates Italy into a Greek model of the world. The Greek hero gets the credit for naming Italy, and the whole incident is fitted into his established legend.⁷⁴

These patterns of interaction and interpretation had been developing for several centuries when, in the early fifth century, the Greeks and Persians fought a

series of wars in the Aegean. While it is customary in modern scholarship to point to the Greco-Persian Wars as a turning point in Greek attitudes toward barbarians, the reality is less clear cut. Greek perceptions and representations of foreign peoples had always been grounded in a Greek context and responded to the conflicts and divisions within Greek society. The wars furnished a new set of characters and narratives through which these conflicts could be argued, but they did not fundamentally change the nature of the arguments.

In the fifth century, discussions of barbarians found their way into an even broader scope of Greek literary genres, including drama, scientific theory, and history. Athenian drama expanded on traditional mythical or historical tales, allowing the characters to explore subtleties of emotion and motivation. Barbarian characters and references to Greeks behaving in “barbarian” ways pervade the plays of Athens’ dramatists. Often, the narratives play on familiar tropes associating barbarians with traits such as drunkenness, cowardice, self-indulgence, and arrogance. The display of these barbarian others helped the people of Athens shape their communal sense of self.⁷⁵ At the same time, the lines between Greek and barbarian were often blurred or erased on the stage. Drama could unsettle a self-satisfied sense of superiority as easily as it could bolster it. In particular, the plays of Euripides challenge the divide between Greeks and barbarians. His *Medea* explores how the Greek Jason is driven by reckless ambition while his foreign wife Medea remains logical and methodical even as she turns to horrific violence in response to Jason’s outrages. In *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the heroes of the Trojan War who at first present themselves as patriotic Greeks striking a blow against a barbarian threat are revealed as craven politicians ginning up a war against an imaginary enemy.⁷⁶ Athenian drama does not speak with a single voice on the barbarians but reenacts debates as old as Homer and Sappho.⁷⁷

{54} Barbarians were brought under scientific scrutiny by the medical text *On Airs, Waters, Places*, composed shortly before 400 BCE and of uncertain authorship but attributed to the physician Hippocrates. The author proposes that the consistent climate of Asia makes its people spiritless and weak while the variability of the European climate makes its people strong and bold.⁷⁸ The coherence of this argument, though, is patchy, and the author vacillates between the environmental argument and a contrary political argument—that monarchy makes people weak, regardless of climate, and democracy makes them strong.⁷⁹ The two perspectives are never reconciled. At one point in the text, the distinction between Greeks and barbarians even collapses entirely as the author asserts: “those Greeks or barbarians in Asia who are not ruled by monarchs but are self-ruling and self-sufficient are the most warlike of all.”⁸⁰ Like Athenian drama, this text does not speak with a single voice but reflects conflicts within Greek society.⁸¹

The most complex investigation of barbarians to come down to us from classical Greece is the work of Herodotus, who composed his history of the Persian Empire and its wars with Greece in the later decades of the fifth century

BCE. We will return to Herodotus' view of the Persians in Chapter 4, but his text explores many other peoples and their relationships with the Greeks. One of Herodotus' most important ideas is a principle of balance in which the ideal state is to be found in between two extremes.⁸² This idea is most fully explored on the axis between Scythia and Egypt.

Egypt, according to Herodotus, was an ancient land filled with monuments of extraordinary scale whose people taught the wisdom of the ages to other nations.⁸³ The Scythians, by contrast, were the youngest of all peoples who built no permanent settlements and refused to learn the customs of other lands.⁸⁴ The differences between these peoples were evident in their responses to Persian invasion: the Egyptians were easily conquered, whereas the Scythians resisted and foiled the Persian advance.⁸⁵ Herodotus found admirable qualities in both cultures: the Egyptians were a source of historical and divine wisdom and their dedication to religion and cleanliness was laudable; the Scythians were a model of audacious defiance in the face of {55} overwhelming Persian forces. Greece was positioned both geographically and conceptually as the middle point between these two extremes: open to the wisdom of the Egyptians, but with the resolve of the Scythians. Herodotus deploys his Egyptian and Scythian ethnographies as others against which to define a superior Greek identity. Some scholars have questioned whether Herodotus had any actual knowledge of Egypt or Scythia or was simply playing a literary game with established "barbarian" tropes.⁸⁶

Despite speculation about his firsthand knowledge of the peoples he describes, Herodotus did not simply imagine Egypt and Scythia. His work engages with the realities of both cultures and with their own self-conceptions. The idea of Egypt as a source of ancient wisdom was not a Greek invention but was important to native Egyptian ideology.⁸⁷ Herodotus also made an effort to correct mistaken Greek ideas about Egypt.⁸⁸ For the Scythians, many of the details he reports, such as his description of royal tombs, are corroborated by archaeological evidence.⁸⁹ His version of the Scythians' origin myth, involving flaming golden gifts that fell from heaven, appears to correlate with independently documented legends from the region.⁹⁰

Herodotus was as much concerned with exploring the fluidity and interconnectedness of cultures as with posing oppositions and defining Greece. He showed a great interest in cultural blending, such as how the Geloni, descendants of Greek colonists and native Scythians, spoke a mixed Greek/Scythian language.⁹¹ He expressed both admiration and condemnation for certain foreign practices, but more often he reported them without judgment and sometimes explicitly asserted a position of neutrality.⁹² Nor was he shy of pointing out the flaws of his fellow Greeks, who could be vindictive, gullible, and ignorant.⁹³

The Greeks had a history of deploying stereotyped narratives about foreign peoples as a way of defining what it meant to be Greek, but this tendency {56} coexisted with an openness to seeing other peoples as they saw themselves, learning from them, and incorporating them into the world the Greeks knew.

Both of these modes of thought reflect how essential connections and relationships with foreign peoples were to the Greeks. Whether othering or embracing, conventional or idiosyncratic, there was no way to think about being Greek without thinking about barbarians.

The World Considers the Greeks

The growth of trade and colonies brought many parts of the Mediterranean world into contact with Greek literary, artistic, and material culture. While non-Greek peoples were less inclined to speculate about the Greeks than Greeks were to speculate about them (or, if they did, those writings have not been preserved), many peoples seem to have been quite happy to employ Greeks and display works of art made by Greeks or in a Greek style.

A king of Lycia, for example, commissioned a monument carved in Greek style with a Greek inscription to be erected at Xanthos in southwestern Anatolia.⁹⁴ Greek mercenaries were present in Egypt by the late 600s and routinely served the Persian Empire.⁹⁵ Greek stonemasons may have been part of the building crew at the palace of the Persian king Cyrus in the mid-500s. By the 400s, Greek artisans are documented working in the Persian capital, and one administrative tablet from the late 500s or early 400s shows a Greek-speaking official in the Persian bureaucracy.⁹⁶ As already noted, Greek pottery was popular in Etruria. Moreover, Etruscans began incorporating Greek motifs and mythic characters into their own metalwork and tomb paintings.⁹⁷

Why did so many other peoples welcome Greeks and products of Greek culture? Up to the mid-twentieth century, most scholars considered the answer obvious: Greek culture was simply better. This was the “Greek miracle.”⁹⁸ Greeks alone had achieved the sublime realization of humanity in their literature and art, while Greek soldiers were superior to any others. Faced with such shining achievements, it was only to be expected that other peoples should {57} import or imitate them (unless, like Egypt, they were already too “effete and decadent” to adapt).⁹⁹ Modern scholarship has generally rejected the idea of superior and inferior cultures, but echoes of the “Greek miracle” still whisper through some histories.¹⁰⁰ If the widespread employment of Greeks and adoption of Greek cultural features do not reflect mere admiration of Greece, we must find other reasons for them.

The omnipresence of Greeks and Greek culture in the Mediterranean is at least partly illusory, conjured by the uneven survival of literary and archaeological evidence and the focus of traditional scholarship. Greeks were far from the only people widely employed as mercenaries. Powerful states such as Egypt and Persia drew in soldiers from all around their frontiers and routinely recruited Carians, Thracians, and Nubians, among others.¹⁰¹ The experiences of Greek mercenaries, however, have been better preserved and studied, through sources such as Xenophon’s account of his experiences in Persia.¹⁰² Similarly, the principal Greek

exports, wine and olive oil, were shipped in ceramic amphorae. Together with the fine pottery that Greece also exported, these vessels survive extremely well in the archaeological record compared with goods such as foodstuffs, textiles, leather, and wood, which overrepresents the popularity of Greek trade goods. The Etruscan demand for Greek pots might not seem so outsized if we could accurately compare it with the Greek demand for foreign products such as those celebrated by the fifth-century playwright Hermippus:

These things, then: from Egypt, sailcloth
and papyrus; frankincense from Syria.
Lovely Crete offers cypress wood for the gods.
Africa has plenty of ivory for sale.
Rhodian raisins and figs give us sweet dreams,
but Euboea has pears and plump apples.
Captives from Phrygia and mercenaries from Arcadia.
Pagasae furnishes tattooed slaves.
Paphlagonia provides the acorns of Zeus
and glossy almonds, as an ornament to our feasts.
{58} The Phoenicians send dates and finest flour;
Carthage, carpets and colorful pillows.¹⁰³

In addition to overemphasizing the demand for Greek goods, earlier scholarship was also overly eager to see the spread of Greek cultural products as reflecting non-Greek aspirations to Greek identity without considering how Greeks could also assimilate into other cultures. The sarcophagus of Wahibre-em-akhet, for instance, shows how a child of Greek parents could assert an Egyptian identity. Demaratus of Corinth's marriage into Etruscan nobility was another kind of assimilation. Such examples do not necessarily reflect a desire to shed Greek identity, but they do run counter to the assumption that all peoples, including the Greek themselves, saw Greekness as a cultural ideal. Foreign cultural objects may also have been deemed valuable precisely for their foreignness: Victorian gentry who collected Chinese porcelain, for instance, did not necessarily desire to be Chinese.¹⁰⁴ The Etruscan taste for Greek pottery may similarly reflect a desire to display the command of profitable trade connections more than a love of Greekness in itself.

Yet not all Greek presence abroad can be explained away as an artifact of scholarship. A wall painting from the François Tomb in Etruria makes the point eloquently. The scene shows an incident from the Trojan War in which Achilles sacrificed Trojan prisoners to the ghost of his friend Patroclus. The story is Greek, but it is situated in an Etruscan context. Achilles is framed by two figures of Etruscan myth: the winged Vanth and the blue-skinned Charu who oversee the passage of the souls of the dead into the afterlife. Here they share a knowing look over Achilles' head, implying that Achilles is not long for the world himself. No Greek parallel for this image exists, and no Greek artist would have portrayed it

in this way, yet it is impossible to grasp the significance of the scene without knowing the Greek story.¹⁰⁵ In this and other examples, Greek culture was incorporated into other cultures in ways that went beyond the importation of foreign luxury goods.

There was something different about the Greeks. The Greek world had no center, not in the way most other ancient cultures did. There were multiple powerful poleis such as Athens, Sparta, Corinth, and Thebes, and places of shared cult and ceremony, such as Delphi and Olympia, but there was nothing comparable to the centralized royal courts of Lydia, Thrace, Egypt, or Persia. Individual Greek cities lacked the stability that ruling dynasties brought to Phoenician or Etruscan cities. There were few reliable sources of patronage for artists, poets, physicians, and other skilled professionals. The turmoil of Greek life also produced plenty of veteran soldiers with no home {59} to go back to. Large numbers of Greek professionals found their way into foreign employ not because Greeks were better at their jobs but because Greeks were plentiful and cheap to hire.¹⁰⁶



{59} Etruscan painting of Achilles sacrificing Trojan prisoners, from the François Tomb (late fourth century BCE), near modern Montalto di Castro, Italy.

Greek culture also traveled in a way that most other cultures did not. Greek colonies were not just places of commerce but venues for the development of artistic and literary culture. In many such places, Greek artists and crafters accommodated local tastes and concerns, in media ranging from pottery to poetry.¹⁰⁷ Making a home abroad required more than setting up a trading base. Greeks remade their culture in the colonies and made it easy for locals to adopt. The result was in some places a fruitful interchange between Greek and non-Greek, like the sculptors who learned to make life-size human statues from Egyptian models. In other places, such as Sicily, the fusion of Greek and non-Greek produced a unique hybrid culture.¹⁰⁸ Peoples throughout the Mediterranean responded to Greek culture not as a unified whole but as local

variants recreated in contact with their own civilizations. Greek themes, motifs, and characters entered the cultural vocabulary of other peoples not because other peoples yearned to be Greek but because Greek colonists, traders, and itinerant professionals worked to offer a version of their own culture that would suit local demand.

Greeks and Barbarians

Just as there was no single kind of barbarian, there was no one way of being Greek. Rather, there were hundreds of local variations on Greekness, created by farmers, aristocrats, colonial settlers, merchants, travelers, and artisans living and working in many different places alongside people of many different backgrounds. When Greeks encountered the world, they welcomed and were welcomed by some, shunned and were shunned by others. In some places they ruled; in others they served. Some of these interactions strengthened the barriers between Greek and non-Greek; others broke them down.

Archaic and classical Greece as we know it existed because of contacts with the outside world. Trade brought both prosperity and violent social upheavals. Colonization fed a cultural self-awareness that found its expression in art, literature, and philosophy. People, goods, and ideas from abroad helped make up the fabric of Greek society. It is natural that Greeks and non-Greeks alike had widely varying reactions to these cultural encounters. Barbarians could be rivals, slaves, and bogeymen, but they could equally be partners, patrons, and friends.

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{61} CHAPTER 4

THE GRECO-PERSIAN WARS

In 480 BCE an army marched into Greece under the command of the Persian king Xerxes. His goal was to conquer Greece and make it part of the Persian Empire. In an unprecedented act of cooperation, many of the Greek poleis set aside their differences and formed a coalition to resist the Persian advance. An army of allies, under the command of the Spartan king Leonidas, took up position at Thermopylae, a natural choke point on a narrow coastal plain.

Leonidas was not the only Spartan king in the action. Demaratus, a former king of Sparta who had been exiled by his people, was with the Persians as an adviser to Xerxes. As the army approached the pass at Thermopylae, Xerxes consulted Demaratus about what his forces were about to face. According to Herodotus, the two kings discussed the Spartans. Xerxes compared his massive army with the small population of Sparta and was incredulous that the Spartans would dare to stand against him. Demaratus assured him that they would do so: “Their master is the law, whom they revere far more than your subjects revere you. They will do what it commands, and it always commands the same: not to flee, whatever the numbers, but to remain in their ranks and to triumph or be destroyed.” Xerxes remained unconvinced.¹

Once the battle began at Thermopylae, Demaratus was proven right. The Greeks held their defensive position and the narrow pass prevented the Persians from bringing their superior numbers to bear. The stalemate dragged on until the Persians finally learned of a mountain track that allowed them to send a contingent to attack the Greek position from behind. Leonidas ordered most of the allied forces to withdraw, but the Spartans, Thespians, and Thebans remained behind and fought to the last man.² Surveying the battlefield in the aftermath, Xerxes admitted that Demaratus had been right.³

The Battle of Thermopylae has come down in legend as one of the great clashes between East and West. Framed by the conversations between Xerxes {62} and Demaratus, it has been interpreted as a test of Western democracy against Eastern tyranny. Since the only thing more romantic than a victory is a noble defeat, Leonidas has been celebrated in forms ranging from ancient hero cult to Hollywood film.⁴

Like most heroic legends, however, Thermopylae becomes more complicated the closer we look at it. Thermopylae was a battle, not a morality play, and the

choices of both sides were dictated more by practicality than ideology. Xerxes' large army required supplies brought across the Aegean by ship, but the Mediterranean is stormy in winter and the Persians could not risk going hungry because of a shipwrecked supply fleet. A swift conquest, before winter came, was therefore crucial to Persian strategy. The Greeks knew they could not expect the army at Thermopylae to hold the Persian forces back indefinitely. Their mission was not to die nobly but to slow down Xerxes' advance enough to strain his supply lines and make a swift conquest impossible. When the Persians turned the Greek flank, the Greeks withdrew. Those who stayed behind may have been intended only as a covering force who would withdraw last, but they ran out of time. Despite Demaratus' assertions to Xerxes, Spartans had been known to withdraw in the face of overwhelming forces before.⁵ If Leonidas did in fact intend to fight to the death, he had strategic reasons for doing so besides romantic heroism. The greatest danger to the Greeks was always that their alliance would fall apart over old rivalries. The Athenians in particular, whose fleet was vital, were suspicious of Sparta's commitment to the cause. By fighting to the last, the Spartans demonstrated their resolve and helped keep the alliance intact. The events at Thermopylae reflect the realities of ancient warfare, not a test of national character.

The conversations between Xerxes and Demaratus in Herodotus' account also mean rather less than some have made them out to.⁶ Like most such dialogues in ancient histories, they were probably pure invention. Herodotus, proud of his fellow Greeks for their resistance to Xerxes, used these exchanges to make a point, but his argument is less sweeping than a cosmic opposition between democratic Greeks and despotic Persians. First of all, Demaratus is {63} explicit that his praise applies only to Spartans, not all Greeks.⁷ Second, it is not freedom or democracy that Demaratus points to, but self-control. The unspoken contrast is not to Persians as a culture but to Xerxes himself, whose capricious character Herodotus explored elsewhere in detail.⁸ The trouble with the Persians was not that they had a king but that they had a bad one, and bad rulers were not unique to Persia; Greeks had had plenty of their own.

The wars between Greece and Persia in the early fifth century have been hailed as the defining clash between East and West and the spark that lit the torch of Western civilization. While the events of the war were important in the history of ancient Greece, the reality is that Greece and Persia were not so starkly opposed as many have made them out to be. Greeks and Persians had much in common, and the history of their interactions turned more on the practicalities of politics and diplomacy than on ideology. The war was a painful and complicated event that provoked many different responses, but it was no clash of civilizations.

The Greco-Persian Wars in Western History

Western scholarship up to the latter half of the twentieth century was

unabashedly pro-Greek and anti-Persian.⁹ The nineteenth-century German historian Barthold Niebuhr spoke for many of his peers when he wrote: “a Persian man has never been a free and proud man. . . . At the same time the Persians are exceptionally cruel. . . . The orientals are an evil and morally corrupt people through and through.”¹⁰ Niebuhr’s English contemporary Sir Edward Creasey began his 1851 history *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* with the battle between a Persian expeditionary force and the Athenians at Marathon in 490 and left no doubt as to how he judged the significance of the event: “on the result of [the Greek generals’] deliberations depended not merely the fate of two armies, but the whole future progress of human civilization.”¹¹ Even a century later in the 1950s, it was regarded as no more than a banal truism to state that “In 480–79 the Greeks saved themselves and the future of European civilization from Oriental conquest.”¹²

{64} The idea of the Greco-Persian Wars as a conflict between two radically opposed forces has lingered on in more modern scholarship but has come to be expressed in cultural rather than racial terms.¹³ One book from 1996 still described some Persian troops as “Stone Age savages” and celebrated the Greek victory as one that “continue[s] to irradiate and quicken our whole western heritage.”¹⁴ Books on the Battle of Salamis, from 2004, and Marathon, from 2010, both argued that the outcome saved Western civilization.¹⁵

A different approach to Greece and Persia has developed with the rise of postcolonial studies. Some scholars have shifted the focus to the Persian perspective and have explained the failure of Persia’s campaigns in Greece less as the product of Greek heroism and more as the result of poor strategic planning on the Persians’ part.¹⁶ Others have ousted the wars from the center of Greco-Persian interactions and traced a long-term pattern of trade, accommodation, and cultural interchange in which the invasions of mainland Greece were only a brief interruption.¹⁷ Greek attitudes toward Persia have been examined more fully and found to be far more nuanced and multifaceted than was long assumed.¹⁸

Understanding the Greco-Persian Wars requires setting aside nineteenth-century assumptions about “Oriental” races and twentieth-century arguments about Western civilization to see both the Persians and the Greeks on their own terms.

Persia

The Persian Empire arose in the context of another empire’s fall. In the tenth century BCE the old northern Mesopotamian kingdom of Assyria began to build an empire using innovative techniques of siege warfare. Walled towns that might have held out for months or years against earlier armies fell to the {65} Assyrians’ towers and battering rams in a matter of days. Supported by its army’s expertise in capturing cities, the Assyrian Empire expanded faster and farther than any

state in the region had done before, ultimately stretching from the edge of the Iranian plateau to the Nile valley.

The Assyrians faced new challenges as their army was stretched thin by its rapid conquests. To suppress rebellion, they massacred, enslaved, or forcibly resettled many conquered peoples and destroyed rebellious cities. Assyrian cruelty was a calculated political strategy, and though effective in the short term, it sowed resentment among its victims. When the empire was weakened by civil war in the late seventh century BCE, an alliance of its subjects and neighbors banded together to overthrow it. A few generations later, with the memory of Assyrian oppression still fresh, the Persians began to build a new empire.¹⁹

The Persians first appear in history as nomads in the southern Iranian plateau at the fringes of Assyrian power. They allied themselves with another Iranian people, the Medes, who lived to their north. Both the Medes and the Persians were part of the anti-Assyrian coalition. In 550 BCE the Persian king Cyrus began a campaign of expansion and ultimately built an empire larger than any the world had seen before. Persian territory stretched from the Indus River in the east to Egypt and Anatolia in the west. Cyrus and his descendants, the Achaemenid dynasty, ruled over this empire for the next three centuries.

In a deliberate contrast to the Assyrians, the Persians adopted a policy of tolerance toward the peoples they ruled. Slavery was forbidden by Persian custom, and though they did not end slaveholding among their subjects, they took no slaves of their own. They never massacred a conquered people and only forcibly resettled the most persistent troublemakers. In fact, the Persians helped some displaced people—notably the Jews—return home and rebuild.

Local cultures were allowed to thrive. The Persians did not impose their customs, language, or laws on their subjects. The only demands they made were the payment of taxes and provision of soldiers for the army. In return, the Persians guaranteed peace and stability, and they supported trade through the construction of roads and the issuing of a common currency. The empire was organized into provinces ruled by governors, called satraps, who had a degree of local autonomy but were accountable to the king for the orderly administration of their territories. At a more local level, the Persians generally left peoples with their own native rulers, so long as those rulers did not support rebellion. Achaemenid royal art, such as the stairway of the ceremonial palace at Persepolis and the tombs cut into cliff faces nearby, shows the king surrounded by subjects of many different ethnicities in their own native garb, rendered in a style that combined elements from the artistic traditions of {66} many different peoples. For the Persians, multiculturalism was both a virtue and a pragmatic policy.²⁰



{66} Ionian Greeks presenting tribute to the Persian king, from the stairway of the palace at Persepolis (sixth century BCE), modern Marvdasht, Iran.



Indians presenting tribute to the Persian king, from the stairway of the palace at Persepolis.

These groups are among the many peoples of the empire portrayed presenting their annual gifts to the king. Notice how the sculptors used details of clothing and hair to distinguish one ethnic group from another while giving them similar postures and actions, suggesting both the diversity of the Persian Empire and the way its peoples are united by their reverence for the king.

{67} Persians and Greeks

No empire has ever been created without violence. The Persian Empire is no exception. Most of the peoples over whom the Persians ruled were, most of the time, content with the arrangement and prospered from it, but some parts of the

empire resisted Persian rule and threatened the stability of their satrapies. The northwestern frontier was a persistent trouble spot for the empire. The conquests of Cyrus had brought the kingdom of Lydia, in western Anatolia, into the empire in 546. Not long before, around 560, the Lydians had conquered the Ionian Greek cities on the Aegean coast. These cities now came under Persian control.

Like most other Greek poleis of the time, the Ionian cities in Anatolia had a variety of constitutions, but most allowed some degree of democratic participation. Democracy is by its nature messy and unpredictable. As practiced in ancient Greece, it was also prone to outbreaks of factional violence. Although it was the Persians' custom to leave local politics alone, they needed a measure of stability on their frontier. They therefore supported the rise of local aristocrats who ruled the Ionian cities as pro-Persian tyrants.²¹

The opponents of these tyrants found shelter across the Aegean in the cities of mainland Greece, especially Athens, which had strong historical ties to the Ionians. Agitation against the tyrants continued until 499 when many of the Ionian cities rose up in revolt. Athens and some other mainland Greek cities committed warships to the cause. The Athenians had their own troubled history with Persia, which helped draw them into the revolt. The former tyrant of Athens, Hippias, had fled to Persia when he was driven out of the city in 510 and had been trying for some time to engineer a return with Persian backing. Having forced out Hippias, the Athenians went through a series of internal conflicts, ending with the establishment of a democratic constitution. When Sparta tried to intervene and help some pro-Spartan aristocrats regain power, the Athenians went so far as to offer submission to Persia in return for protection. After the Spartan threat had passed, however, the Athenians wanted neither Persian rule nor the return of Hippias. Driving the Persians back from the Aegean coast must have seemed a prudent step toward avoiding both.²²

The Ionian revolt had some initial success, including capturing and burning down the satrapal capital at Sardis, but in the end the rebellion was a failure. Most of the Ionian cities accepted their old tyrants back on the promise that no harm would come to them. The only city to suffer reprisals was Miletus, where the revolt had begun and which held out until recaptured by force. The population of the city was forcibly resettled at the mouth of the Tigris {68} River. The Persians' uncharacteristically harsh treatment of the Milesians shows how vexing this frontier problem had become.²³

The Persians continued to try to pacify their Aegean frontier through diplomacy and targeted strikes against foreign agitators such as Athens. In 491 King Darius sent envoys to many cities on the Greek mainland and islands asking for earth and water, the traditional symbols of submission to Persia. Many cities, remembering what happened to Miletus, acquiesced.²⁴ The next year, Darius sent a naval expedition across the sea against Athens and some of the other cities who persisted in resistance. Hippias, now an old man, was brought along in the hopes that he could rally local supporters and seize control of the city, but that support never materialized. After a long standoff, some of the Persian forces were defeated

in battle with the Athenian army at Marathon. The rest tried to sail around Attica and attack the undefended city, but the Athenian troops raced overland in time to draw up outside the city walls as the Persian ships came into view. The Persians withdrew to Ionia.²⁵

In 486 Darius was succeeded by his son Xerxes, who decided that after some sixty years of trying to manage the Aegean frontier, the time had come to conquer and incorporate the territory. In 480, apart from the delaying action at Thermopylae, Persian forces marched largely unopposed into Greece. Most Athenians abandoned their city and fell back to the fleet. In the straits between the island of Salamis and the Attic coast the allied Greek fleet won a major battle against the Persian navy and changed the strategic calculus. Without naval superiority, the Persians could no longer count on keeping their army supplied by ship. Xerxes withdrew with most of his army, leaving a small force under his general Mardonius to overwinter in Thessaly and continue the campaign the next year. The following summer the Greeks assembled the largest army they could muster and defeated Mardonius' troops at Plataea. Following up on the victory, the Greek forces expelled Persian garrisons from many of the cities they had occupied in their march.²⁶

Once the Persians had been driven out of Europe, Sparta withdrew its forces from the alliance. Athens instead took the lead and organized a new alliance, known as the Delian League, with the avowed purpose of carrying on the fight to liberate the Greek cities in Ionia and defend them from Persian interference. The Ionian cities seized the opportunity to rebel against Persia again and joined up with the new league. Athenian-led forces won a decisive victory against the Persians at Eurymedon in 466 that secured Athenian dominance over the Aegean for decades.²⁷

{69} Greek Reactions to the Wars with Persia

The wars with Persia were traumatic to those who lived through them. Most of Greece was involved in the fighting and many cities suffered deep losses. After the war, Greeks enjoyed a long period of peace and prosperity. Their art and literature expressed a new sense of self-confidence. The Parthenon of Athens, great works of drama and philosophy, the maturing of classical sculpture and vase painting—much of what we think of as the defining achievements of ancient Greek civilization were created when the Battles of Marathon and Plataea were no more than a generation or two in the past. It is no surprise that we find the experience of the wars reflected in many of the great works of Greek culture.

Persians became the definitive barbarians in Greek consciousness and certain conventional narratives emerged in discussions of both the Persians and the wars.²⁸ These narratives became part of the Greek philosophical, literary, and artistic repertoire, to be deployed at need and liable, like all such conventional narratives, to be reduced to shorthand and caricature. One narrative depicted the

wars as a struggle between free but disciplined Greeks and weak-willed Persians under a despotic king.²⁹ Another regarded Greek victory as the vindication of democracy.³⁰ The unity of the Greeks in their alliance against the invaders was also celebrated.³¹ Another common theme was the hardness of Greeks who lived in poverty as compared with the softness of Persians accustomed to luxury.³² There was never a single unified Greek view on Persia. Multiple conflicting and overlapping narratives always existed.

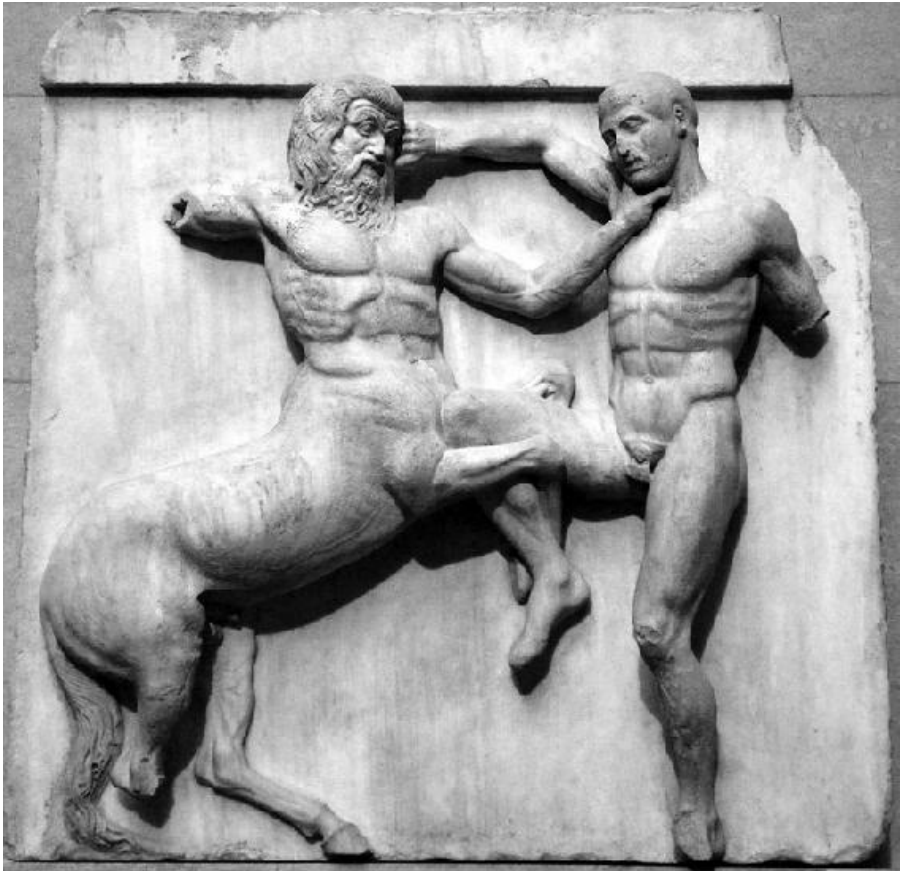
Some Greek ideas reduced the Persians to stereotypes. A narrative of otherness depicted the Greeks as hardy, democratic, masculine, and independent while portraying the Persians as soft, despotic, feminine, and servile.³³ The philosopher Plato used Persia as an archetypal example of monarchy and its failings.³⁴ His student Aristotle went further and defined all barbarians as natural slaves fit to be ruled over by Greeks.³⁵ The orators Demosthenes and {70} Isocrates both invoked the weakness of Persia in their arguments over Athenian foreign policy, clearly appealing to a theme their audience knew well.³⁶

Not all Greek responses to Persia were so straightforward. The writer and sometime mercenary Xenophon's *The Education of Cyrus* is a fictionalized account of King Cyrus' youth that presents him as a model of temperance, honesty, and martial vigor. The final chapter of the work, however, portrays a modern Persia in which Cyrus' virtues have all been overthrown and replaced with the vices of greed, gluttony, and deceit.³⁷ The change is so dramatic that it seems unlikely Xenophon meant his conclusion to be taken at face value but was instead ironically tweaking an existing narrative of Persian decline.³⁸ *The Education of Cyrus* casts contemporary Persians as the most stereotyped of others, but they stand in contrast to the virtue of earlier Persians, not Greeks.

Artistic renditions of Persians and the Persian wars are a similarly mixed group. Persians and Greeks in battle appear as a common theme of vase painting in the decades after the war, but while the Persians are depicted as the enemy, they are not caricatured as weak, effeminate, or cowardly. They stand their ground and fight as worthy adversaries; sometimes they even win.³⁹

In other cases, the Persians were assimilated into the Greek mythic tradition. In the Painted Stoa in Athens, images of the Battle of Marathon were paired with depictions of the hero Theseus fighting Amazons and Greeks fighting Trojans.⁴⁰ On the Parthenon the Persians are evoked only through mythic analogues, as Greek heroes battle Trojans, Amazons, and centaurs. The symbolism is potent, but not simple. On one hand, figures such as Amazons and centaurs represent chaos. Their defeat is necessary for the restoration of good order as personified by Greek heroes.⁴¹ The Trojans are a different case. {71} The legends of the Trojan War were among the most celebrated Greek myths, but the moral standing of the Greeks as destroyers of Troy was dubious, and the story of Troy was as much one of tragedy as of triumph.⁴² Recasting the Trojans as precursors of the Persians made the Greco-Persian Wars equally complex. As Herodotus points out, the destruction of Troy was a gross overreaction to the abduction of one woman.⁴³ In this mythic context, Xerxes' invasion of Greece could even be seen as justified

retribution for the Greek invasion of Troy.



{71} A Greek and a centaur fighting, from the decoration of the Parthenon in Athens (currently in the British Museum, London). The centaur's emotional face and wild brawling style contrast with the Greek's self-control and good wrestling form. Without explicitly depicting the Greco-Persian Wars, this image evokes the claim that Greek discipline and perseverance triumphed over Persian disorder.



{72} One side of the "Eurymedon vase," currently in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Germany



The other side of the "Eurymedon vase."

{72} The modern assumption that Greeks and Persians were implacable enemies has distorted the interpretation of some artworks, such as the so-called Eurymedon vase. On one side of this vase stands a man naked but for a cloak, grasping his penis in one hand. On the opposite side a man in form-fitting clothes carrying a bow case stands bent forward with his hands raised. Between the two figures runs the text: "I am Eurymedon. I am bent over." This image has conventionally been interpreted as a bawdy celebration of the Greek victory at Eurymedon; as Dover put it: "We've buggered the Persians."⁴⁴ But this interpretation depends on the unfounded assumption that Greeks considered being the penetrated partner in a homosexual liaison demeaning. In fact, a liaison like the one depicted was considered humiliating for both partners, not because of who was doing what to whom but because their disorderly haste showed a lack of self-control.⁴⁵ The identities of the two figures are also less than clear. The Greek is unarmed and unkempt, far from heroic. The "Persian" may actually be a Scythian, another people customarily depicted in {73} close-fitting clothes carrying bows.⁴⁶ "Eurymedon" is the name of not only a river but also numerous individuals, including the man who introduced Scythian archers into Athens as a kind of police force.⁴⁷ This vase may be a bit of political mockery aimed not at the Persians but at an Athenian.

Herodotus and Aeschylus: Bringing the Persians Home

While Greek art and literature of the classical age celebrates Greek victory, its attitudes toward the Persians are diverse and subtle. Simple narratives contrasting Greek virtue with Persian wickedness are a part of that diversity, but only a part. Two surviving works of Greek literature engage more deeply with the nature of the Persians and the causes of their wars against the Greeks than any others: Aeschylus' drama *The Persians* and Herodotus' *Histories*.⁴⁸ Both of these texts emphasize the similarities between Greeks and Persians more than their differences.

Aeschylus' tragedy takes place at the Persian court where the queen mother Atossa anxiously discusses the war with Persian elders. A messenger arrives bearing the news of defeat at Salamis and Atossa summons the spirit of Darius for counsel before Xerxes, defeated and bedraggled, finally returns home. Aeschylus was a veteran of the wars who was manifestly proud of his service and one might have expected a triumphal celebration of Greek victory, but the play is surprisingly subtle.⁴⁹

{74} *The Persians* is a tragedy and Xerxes is its hero. The tragic hero is by definition a noble character brought down by the flaws in his nature. In Aeschylus' drama, Xerxes' flaws are rashness and arrogance, not an unusual turn in Greek tragedy. The catharsis that tragedy was meant to create came in the tension between the audience's compassion for the sufferings of the hero and their horror at the deeds that led to his downfall. Without the audience being able to imaginatively cast themselves in the role of the tragic hero and recognize the small echoes of his faults in themselves, tragedy fails. Greek drama created empathy between the audience and the hero by inviting the audience to imagine the play as taking place in their own city. By setting his play in Persia with a cast of Persian characters, Aeschylus was asking his Athenian audience to imagine themselves as Persians.

Praise of Greece in the play is muted. Atossa questions the chorus as to who commands the Athenians and learns that "They are said to be no one's slaves and heedful of no man." Later the herald who describes the Battle of Salamis comments on the Greeks' unity in battle, but both sections are brief.⁵⁰ Aeschylus does not disparage the Persians but presents them as a noble people. As Darius recounts, their state was ordained by Zeus who gave the scepter of kingship to their first ruler.⁵¹ Atossa recalls a dream in which she saw Greece and Persia personified as two sisters whom Xerxes tried to yoke to a chariot. While Persia accepted the bridle, Greece refused and smashed the yoke, but in Atossa's eyes they were equal in beauty.⁵²

The play leaves us in no doubt that Xerxes was wrong to invade Greece. Darius castigates his son's arrogance and condemns the invading army's sacrilegious destruction of temples and sacred images.⁵³ But this was Xerxes' failing, not a fault of the Persians as a whole, and if Aeschylus' audience were to condemn overseas expeditions and the burning of temples, they would have to admit that

the Athenians had interfered in Ionia and burned Sardis long before Xerxes had gone on the march. Nor was their involvement in the Ionian revolt the only campaign the Athenians had cause to regret. The hero of Marathon, Miltiades, had led a disastrous campaign in the Aegean in 489 that ended so badly he was nearly put to death on his return.⁵⁴ The success of Aeschylus' {75} drama depended on the Athenians' ability to see the Persians as people in whose troubles and sorrows they could share, not as oppositional others.

Herodotus' *Histories* offers a similarly nuanced view of the Persians and their dealings with the Greeks. Early in his work, Herodotus gives an ethnographic account of the Persians with a mix of praise and disapproval. On one hand, the Persians were devout, truth-loving, and courteous. Their laws were moderate and they especially esteemed martial prowess and honesty. On the other hand, they overindulged in wine and fine foods, they abased themselves in unseemly ways before men of high status, and they left the bodies of the dead to be mauled by birds and dogs before burial, which offended Greek sensibilities. On the whole, however, Herodotus avoids judging the Persians. Their customs were appropriate for them just as Greek customs were appropriate for Greeks. The fact that their ways were different did not make them wrong.⁵⁵

Herodotus' Persians were not ethnic stereotypes or anti-Greek others but individuals with their own individual virtues and flaws. Some, indeed, were bad. The worst of the lot was Cyrus' abusive and impious son Cambyses. Xerxes was not much better, but his flaws were different: rashness and changeability. It was not only kings who were flawed: Xerxes' general Mardonius was a blustering bully and a fount of bad advice.⁵⁶ On the other hand, many Persians were good. Like Xenophon, Herodotus praises the wisdom of Cyrus, but he does not go on to paint the Persians of his own day as degenerate. Persians with admirable qualities were to be found in any age. Prexaspes, a general of Cambyses, revealed his master's crimes to the public. Otanes, Darius, and a group of other noblemen, aided by Otanes' daughter Phaidymie, boldly overthrew a usurper and then held a rational debate about what form of government was best. Darius' general Zopyrus endured extreme physical hardship in order to get behind the walls of Babylon and open the gates for the king's army. Artabanus provided wise counsel both to Darius and Xerxes.⁵⁷

Like Aeschylus, there is no doubt that Herodotus deplored the Persian invasions of Greece and was proud of his countrymen for their resistance, but the blame fell on Darius and Xerxes, not the Persians as a whole. Herodotus evinces sympathy for the Persians who were burdened with bad kings.⁵⁸ Bad kings do not make a bad people, and the Persians were hardly the only ones to have them. The Egyptians and Lydians had them, too, but the bad rulers {76} Herodotus devotes most of his attention to are the Greek tyrants, whose crimes included theft of private property, abuse of women, and the murder of rivals.⁵⁹

Herodotus was on the side of democracy, but he was not an absolutist. He knew that democracies sometimes failed, just as some kings were good. He also knew that democracy was not a definitively Greek invention. Greeks had lived

under tyrants and, as he is at pains to inform his audience, the Persians were perfectly familiar with democracy.⁶⁰ The Persians and Greeks were, if anything, more alike than any other people Herodotus knew.

This similarity gives force to one of Herodotus' most powerful passages. At the very end of his history, once Xerxes' invasion had been defeated, Herodotus casts his eye all the way back to the birth of the Persian Empire some seventy years before. He recounts a story in which some Persians approached Cyrus and proposed that they go forth and conquer an empire. Cyrus warned them that this plan would lead to their downfall: "For from soft lands come soft men; the same land cannot bear rich fruits and noble, valorous men."⁶¹ Herodotus' audience was the Athenians of the late fifth century who were themselves engaged in a project of empire building at the head of the Delian League. Cyrus' warning to his people serves as a warning to the Greeks about the consequences of imperialism. Like Aeschylus, Herodotus believed his Greek audience could see the similarities between the Persians and themselves.

The Greek and Persian worlds had long been entangled. The wars left their scars, but they did not leave Greeks and Persians polarized and unable to think beyond binary oppositions. Individuals traveled between the two cultures, trade carried on, and culture was shared. Athenians adopted elements of Persian art, architecture, and dress while Ionian artisans helped carve the tombs of Persian kings.⁶² Stereotyped and pejorative attitudes toward Persia {77} existed in the Greek world, but they existed alongside narratives that made Persians familiar, individual, and sympathetic.

The Greco-Persian Wars and Western Civilization

Although the wars with Persia were important events in fifth-century Greece, their consequences were not simple, nor should they be magnified into a battle for the fate of the West. The Persians and the Greeks were not idealized representatives of two fundamentally different ways of life. Greece was a small, underdeveloped, fractious region whose politics, economy, and culture had long been entangled with Persia's. Persian kings recruited Greek mercenaries and hosted Greek exiles. Some Greek cities sought or accepted admission to the Persian Empire as a bulwark against their enemies, and Persians were sometimes looked to as arbiters between warring Greek factions.⁶³ The fact that Herodotus knew so much about the Persian Empire, its peoples, and its history testifies to the deep interconnections between the two cultures.⁶⁴

While the outcome of the wars was important to the Greeks, the events were much less momentous for the Persians. The loss of territories in Europe and the Aegean registered very little effect on the wider empire. The Persian kings returned to a diplomatic strategy for dealing with the Greek problem, patiently managing frontier affairs as the Greeks wore themselves down with inter-polis fighting. This diplomacy eventually paid off in the fourth century when the

Persians were able to dictate terms to exhausted Greek cities. For Persia, the conflicts with Greece had never been ideological. The shift from a military to a diplomatic approach to dealing with the unstable frontier region was a rational adaptation of policy. A useful comparison can be made with the Roman Empire's policy toward the peoples of its northern frontier: when conquest proved unfeasible, Rome's interests in the region were secured through diplomacy instead (see Chapter 11).

The idea that Persia would have stifled the emergence of democracy and classical art, literature, and philosophy, thus cutting off Western civilization at the source, is misguided. On one hand it gives classical Greek culture an unwarranted status, and on the other it misapprehends Persian culture.

The art, architecture, literature, and philosophy of classical Greece have long had a place of special honor in the Western tradition, not because Greek culture was superior but because later peoples chose to elevate and emulate it. {78} The veneration of Greece was part of the ideology of European imperialism in which connections to the classical past were asserted as marks of a "superior" society justified in its conquest and colonization of "inferior" societies. Without Greek culture to emulate, later Europeans would simply have found other markers of status to celebrate.⁶⁵

Moreover, it is unlikely that a Persian conquest of mainland Greece would have snuffed out the creative flowering of the following age. The unexpected victory over Persia did invigorate the Greek imagination, but it was not the sole cause for the developments of the classical age.⁶⁶ The archaic period saw a tremendous flowering of cultural inventiveness in Greece, even through difficult periods of war and internal conflict. There is no reason why defeat by the Persians should have stopped up that creativity. The Persians had no interest in suppressing Greek culture.⁶⁷ The Ionian Greek cities thrived economically and culturally under Persian rule.⁶⁸ Persian kings and satraps patronized Greek artists, and elements of Greek art were incorporated into the multicultural Achaemenid court style.⁶⁹ Greek culture under Persian rule would surely have been different, but it would not have simply ended.

Like Greek culture, Greek democracy may have been different under Persian rule, but it would not have disappeared. In 480 the Athenians had lived under a stable democratic constitution for less than three decades, but democracy was not a fresh flower to be easily plucked. It was the product of centuries of social pressures and power struggles that were not unique to Athens and that could not be simply dispelled by Persian fiat. While most of the Greek poleis were governed with some degree of citizen participation, the nature of their constitutions varied drastically from one state to another, with many dominated by entrenched aristocracies. Sparta was a far more totalitarian state than the Persian Empire. The image of Persians as enervated slaves cowering under their master's lash is a gross fiction.

After conquering the Ionian cities, the Persians suppressed democracies and installed friendly tyrants, but in the aftermath of the Ionian revolt the Persian

satrap Artaphrenes renegotiated the arrangements in Ionia to be more favorable to the Ionians. The Persian general Mardonius shortly later deposed the Ionian tyrants and established democracies.⁷⁰ No doubt these democracies were required to maintain an acceptable level of stability and not to {79} challenge Persian suzerainty.⁷¹ Still, Persian rule was pragmatic and flexible. The Persians had no ideological opposition to democracy.⁷² As in Ionia, if the Persians had conquered mainland Greece they would soon have found it prudent to compromise on the nature of their rule there.

Furthermore, democracy was not a uniquely Greek invention. Other peoples had experimented with varieties of participatory government before and would do so later—notably the Roman republic.⁷³ Greek democracy was always a work in progress built up out of personal feuds and precarious compromises, not a pristine development gifted to the world. It was a government that excluded women and immigrants (sometimes even the native-born descendants of immigrants) and that depended on a large slave population. Persian culture abhorred slavery, allowed women substantial freedoms, and welcomed people of all origins. In many ways, the ideals of modern Western society are more in line with those of ancient Persia than those of ancient Greece.

Persians and Greeks

The popular memory of Greeks and Persians tends to be dominated by the image of heroic Spartans making their last stand against a tyrannical Xerxes at Thermopylae. The reality of Greco-Persian relations was never so simple.

From a Persian point of view, Greece was at worst a minor frontier nuisance. Persians neither hated the Greeks nor wished to destroy their culture but welcomed Greek dignitaries, traders, and artisans into their multi-ethnic empire. Many Greek cities flourished under Persian rule, and Persian goods and ideas were welcomed in Greece, even in the aftermath of war.

The Greeks who lived through the Greco-Persian Wars of the early fifth century were deeply affected by the experience, and it is no surprise that we find anti-Persian sentiments in later Greek culture. The wars, however, were only a brief incident in a centuries-long history of commercial, cultural, and personal interaction between the Greek and Persian worlds. Many Greeks, even those who were proud of the victories against Darius and Xerxes, also thought of the Persians in ways that were sympathetic and nuanced. Indeed, the more focused the attention Greeks gave to Persia, the more they tended to dwell on the things that made Greeks and Persians similar, not different. Between Greece and Persia there were a few clashes of armies, but never a clash of civilizations.

1. Herodotus, *Histories* 7.101–4.
2. Herodotus says that Leonidas kept the Thebans from retreating with the other forces because he did not trust them, but Herodotus' anti-Theban bias is notorious. Since the defeat at Thermopylae left Thebes exposed to Persian attack, it is more likely that the Theban troops stayed voluntarily in a last-ditch defense of their city. Herodotus 7.222–25.
3. Herodotus 7.234.
4. John Marincola, "The Persian Wars in Fourth-Century Oratory and Historiography," in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium*, ed. Emma Bridges, Edith Hall, and P. J. Rhodes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 105–25; Ian MacGreggor Morris, "'Shrines of the Mighty': Rediscovering the Battlefields of the Persian War," in Bridges et al., *Cultural Responses*, 231–64.
5. Herodotus himself documents Spartan retreats from Athens (5.72) and Aegina (6.50) in the face of massive resistance.
6. Redfield, "Herodotus the Tourist," 115–16; Hartog, *Mirror of Herodotus*, 334; Donald Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 160; Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 61–62. See also Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 21–22.
7. Herodotus 7.102.2.
8. Herodotus 7.5–19, 28–29, 38–39.
9. Said, *Orientalism*, 55–58.
10. Barthold Georg Niebuhr, *Vorträge über Alte Geschichte*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1847), 155. Translation from Maria Brosius, *The Persians* (London: Routledge, 2006), 78.
11. Sir Edward Shepherd Creasey, *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World: From Marathon to Waterloo* (London, 1851), ch. 1.
12. P. A. Brunt, "The Hellenic League against Persia," *Historia* 2, no. 2 (1953): 135–63, quotation on 135.
13. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); Anthony Pagden, *Worlds at War: The 2,500-Year Struggle between East and West* (New York: Random House, 2008).
14. Peter Green, *The Greco-Persian Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 64, 287.
15. Barry Strauss, *The Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter That Saved Greece—and Western Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 247–48; Billows, *Marathon*, 255–61.
16. A. T. Olmstead, "Persia and the Greek Frontier Problem," *Classical Philology* 34, no. 4 (October 1939): 305–22; Jack Martin Balcer, "The Persian Wars against Greece: A Reassessment," *Historia* 38, no. 2 (1989): 127–43; George Cawkwell, *The Greek Wars: The Failure of Persia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
17. Jack Martin Balcer, "The Greeks and the Persians: The Processes of Acculturation," *Historia* 32, no. 3 (1983): 257–67; Pericles B. Georges, "Persian Ionia under Darius: The Revolt Reconsidered," *Historia* 49, no. 1 (2000): 1–39.
18. Bridges et al., *Cultural Responses*; Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*.
19. Simon Anglim et al., *Fighting Techniques of the Ancient World* (New York: St. Martin's, 2002), 184–88.
20. Brosius, *Persians*, 6–76, esp. 6–8, 49–53.
21. Herodotus 4.137.
22. Herodotus 5.73, 96.
23. The Ionian revolt is recounted in detail by Herodotus at 5.30–6.33.
24. Herodotus 6.48.
25. Herodotus 6.94–116.
26. Xerxes' campaign is recounted in books 7–9 of Herodotus.
27. Thucydides, *History* 1.96–100.
28. Hartog, *Mirror of Herodotus*, 323–24; Pericles B. Georges, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 245; Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 257–61; McCoskey, *Race*, 53–54.

29. Aeschylus, *Persians* 242–43; Herodotus 7.102–4; Isocrates, *Panegyric* 1501; Plato, *Laws* 3.693d–4a, 697c–e; Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 8.8.5.
30. Aeschylus, *Persians* 230–45; Herodotus 5.78.
31. Herodotus 7.145, 8.3, 144; Isocrates, *Panegyric* 139. Obliquely in Herodotus 5.3.
32. Arrian, *Anabasis* 2.7; Isocrates, *Panegyric* 133; Plato, *Laws* 3.694e, 3.695c–6a; Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 8.8.7, 8.8.9–12, 8.8.15–19, 8.8.26.
33. Nippel, “Construction of the ‘Other,’” 288–93.
34. Plato, *Laws* 3.693c–8a.
35. Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1252b, 1.1254a, 7.1327b.
36. Demosthenes, *Speeches* 14 (“On the Symmories”); Isocrates, *Panegyric*; Isocrates, *To Philip*. On the further development of this theme, see Pierre Briant, “History and Ideology: The Greeks and ‘Persian Decadence,’” trans. Antonia Nevill, in Harrison, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 193–210.
37. Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 8.8.
38. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 53–65. Johnson reads the text as anti-imperial rather than anti-Persian. See David M. Johnson, “Persians as Centaurs in Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 135 (2005): 177–207.
39. Wulf Raeck, *Zum Barbarenbild in der Kunst Athens im 6. und 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1981), 109–33, 138–47; Tonio Hölscher, “Feindwelten–Glückswelten: Perser, Kentauren und Amazonen,” in *Gegenwelten zu den Kulturen Griechlands und Rom in der Antike*, ed. Tonio Hölscher (Munich: Saur, 2000), 287–320, esp. 312–14; Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 44–45.
40. Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.15. See E. D. Francis and Michael Vickers, “The Oenoe Painting in the Stoa Poikile, and Herodotus’ Account of Marathon,” *Annual of the British School at Athens* 80 (1985): 99–111.
41. For broader discussion of Greek artistic responses to the Persian wars, see David Castriota, *Myth, Ethos, and Actuality: Official Art in Fifth-Century Athens* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Cohen, *Not the Classical Ideal*.
42. James W. Neville, “Herodotus on the Trojan War,” *Greece and Rome* 24, no. 1 (April 1977): 3–12; Joseph Roisman, “Greek Perspectives on the Justness and Merits of the Trojan War,” *College Literature* 35, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 97–109.
43. Herodotus 1.4.
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GREEKS, MACEDONIANS, AND PERSIANS

An ambitious prince assembled an army on the shores of the Aegean Sea and marched on the Persian Empire in a bold attempt to put himself on the throne. He was a charismatic leader who believed that a general must face the rigors of combat alongside his troops. His swift progress caught the Persian king off guard, but their forces finally clashed, and the two commanders faced one another across a battlefield in northern Mesopotamia. The prince's name was Cyrus, and he was a younger brother of the Persian king, Artaxerxes II.

The story of Cyrus' revolt against his brother begins in the last years of the fifth century BCE. Cyrus—known as Cyrus the Younger to distinguish him from the founder of the empire—was appointed satrap of Lydia by his father, King Darius II, with a mission to reestablish Persian influence in the Aegean. Cyrus accomplished this task by working with the Spartan naval commander Lysander and financially backing Sparta in its long war against Athens. Persian money turned the tide, and Sparta forced Athens into submission.

In the meantime, Darius II had passed away, leaving the empire to his elder son who ruled as Artaxerxes II. Cyrus, however, began plotting to oust his brother and make himself king. With the war in Greece over, it was easy to recruit soldiers from around the Aegean. In 401 BCE Cyrus reached out to his old friend Lysander. Sparta was riding high after its victory over Athens, and Lysander persuaded his fellow Spartans that putting Cyrus on the Persian throne would give them a valuable ally to help secure Spartan dominance in Greece. A company of around ten thousand mercenaries joined Cyrus under a Spartan commander.

The army proceeded quickly toward the heart of the Persian Empire. The revolt caught Artaxerxes unprepared, and his hastily assembled army met Cyrus' rebels at Cunaxa in Babylonia. There Cyrus' forces outfought the royal army, but Cyrus felt the need to personally face his brother in combat. Cyrus was killed in the fighting, his army fell apart, and Artaxerxes remained secure on his throne.¹

{82} Less than a century later, another princely general assembled an army of peoples from around the Aegean and marched on Persia to claim the throne. This time, the general was a Macedonian named Alexander and his attempt succeeded,

earning him fame and the title “the Great.” The difference between Cyrus and Alexander is largely one of success. Both were young men of royal lineage who came from outside Greece but were engaged with Greek affairs. Both had the same ambition and pursued it in much the same way. Both craved the glory of personal combat. Alexander nearly shared Cyrus’ fate when he was almost killed in his first battle against Persian forces.

It should not surprise us that a Persian prince and a young Macedonian king should have such similar ambitions and attitudes. Greeks, Macedonians, and Persians were thoroughly interconnected. Even after the defeat of Xerxes’ invasion of Greece, the Persian Empire continued to be a significant political force in the region, and major developments in Greek and Macedonian history involved or responded to the policies of Persia. Understanding the Aegean world in the period between Xerxes and Alexander requires seeing how Greeks, Macedonians, and Persians interacted with one another.

Persia, Greece, and Macedonia

When Xerxes invaded Greece in 480 BCE, Persia already controlled Anatolia and the regions of Thrace and Macedonia on the northern Aegean coast.² After the defeat of Persian forces at Plataea in 479, the Greek allies drove back Persian control from the north and east of the Aegean, but the Persian Empire was a fact of Aegean politics. Peoples such as the Greeks and Macedonians could ally with Persia or oppose it, but they could never ignore it. Like many other empires in history, the Persians found their frontier zones a never-ending source of trouble. The military setbacks they suffered in the fifth century forced them to reevaluate their plans in the Aegean, but their interests in the region remained unchanged. Their main concern was preventing foreign interference from destabilizing their western provinces.

Unrest elsewhere in the empire kept Persian forces occupied until the middle of the fifth century, including a major uprising in Egypt in the 460s and 450s which was aided by Athenian troops. Persia at first tried to bribe the Spartans to start a war and distract Athens, but nothing came of it. In the end, Persian forces destroyed the Athenians in Egypt and put a stop to the revolt, but Egypt continued to be a trouble spot, with the prospect of Greek interference there being one of the empire’s enduring concerns.³ After their {83} successes in Egypt, Persian forces made an attempt to strike at the Aegean in 450 but were defeated by Athens. Hostilities subsided after 450. Some ancient authors credit a treaty between Athens and Persia, called the Peace of Callias, in which Persia promised to stay out of the Aegean and Athens promised not to interfere in Persia’s western provinces.⁴

Two alliances of city-states became the dominant political forces in Greece in the mid-fifth century. The Peloponnesian League, headed by Sparta, which had begun as a mechanism for maintaining stability in the Peloponnese, now became

a tool for exerting Spartan influence abroad. The Delian League, headed by Athens, was founded as an anti-Persian mutual defense alliance but in time became an Athenian empire maintained by force. Tensions mounted as Athens and Sparta both expanded their hegemonies. The original terms of the Delian League called for contributions of ships and soldiers to a joint military force, but over time Athens began to collect cash payments instead and funnel the league's money to its own projects. Maintaining a navy required enormous amounts of timber, which was in short supply in Greece. Thrace and Macedonia were rich in timber, and Macedonian forests had been crucial to the buildup of the Athenian fleet before the Persian invasion. Athens aggressively expanded its influence in the northern Aegean in order to secure these resources.⁵

The rulers of Macedonia had been interested in the Greek world since at least the late sixth century when King Amyntas I pursued diplomatic and economic connections with Athens and other Greek cities. During his reign, however, Macedonia became a vassal state of Persia. Amyntas' successor, Alexander I—great-great-great-grandfather of Alexander the Great—had to balance his policy toward Greece with loyalty to Persia.⁶ Macedonian troops marched with Xerxes, and Alexander served as a Persian emissary to the Greeks.⁷ Marriages were arranged between Macedonian noblewomen and Persian men.⁸ Persian support allowed Macedonia to expand its own territory. After the Greek victory at Plataea, Alexander defended his service to Persia as having protected his Greek friends from the worst of Xerxes' wrath. The embarrassing marriages were covered up with a fanciful story about Macedonian men disguising themselves as women to assassinate unruly Persian envoys.⁹

A long series of conflicts between Athens and Sparta began in 431 and lasted until 404, conventionally termed the Peloponnesian War. While the Spartan army was invincible on land, Athens' control of the sea allowed it to avoid a decisive land battle while keeping its people fed with imported food. The stalemate between the main powers left much of the war's fighting in remote parts of the Peloponnesian and Delian Leagues' territories or among their allies, including Macedonia and Thrace. King Perdiccas II of Macedonia allied alternately with Athens and Sparta, switching sides repeatedly over the course of the war in his efforts to keep his own country stable.

This deadlock provided the opportunity for Persia to reengage in Aegean affairs. Naval construction was costly, and while Athens relied on its Delian "allies" to finance its fleet, Sparta could not compete. Realizing the need for money, Sparta began negotiating with the Persian satraps in Anatolia. Athens also reached out to the Persians hoping to negotiate a deal of its own.¹⁰ Eventually, Persia agreed to finance the Spartan navy while Sparta pledged to restore Persian control over the Ionian cities.¹¹ Rivalries among the Anatolian satraps hampered the collaboration, but in 407 Darius II sent Cyrus to take charge of affairs on the Aegean frontier with funds from the royal treasury. Athens was soon defeated.¹²

The conclusion of the war freed up many Greek soldiers for Cyrus' attempt to take the throne from his brother. When Cyrus was killed, the Spartans lost their

best advocate in Persia, and Artaxerxes II did not look kindly on the Greeks who had backed his brother's attempted coup. After this sour turn in Spartan-Persian relations, when several Ionian cities rebelled against Persia, Sparta stepped in and laid claim to them.¹³ The new satrap of Lydia offered money to Sparta's rivals in Greece if they would make war on Sparta and divert Spartan forces from Ionia.¹⁴ Several cities in Greece, including some of Sparta's former allies who were growing aggravated with Spartan imperialism, were eager to take up the fight.¹⁵ In 395 an alliance of Athens, Thebes, {85} Corinth, and Argos began a war against Sparta, known as the Corinthian War, which lasted until 387.

As Athens' military might rebounded, the Athenians began to interfere in Persian concerns again by supporting rebels in Egypt and Cyprus. Persia, in response, threw its support back to Sparta. The combined threat of Sparta and Persia induced the allies to make peace on terms negotiated by Artaxerxes II and a Spartan, Antalcidas. The treaty, known as the King's Peace or the Peace of Antalcidas, promised autonomy to the cities of mainland Greece, restored Persian control of Ionia, and made Sparta the guarantor of regional stability, with the threat that Persia would join the fight against any city that broke the peace.¹⁶

Despite the promises of the King's Peace, Greece remained unsettled. In the first half of the fourth century, Sparta, Athens, Corinth, Thebes, and other cities continued to struggle for dominance. The chaos suited Persia as it largely kept the Greeks from interfering in Persian affairs. Sparta, while still in control of the Peloponnesian League, invoked the promise of "autonomy" to forcibly break up alliances among other cities. Many cities around the Aegean, alarmed by Spartan aggression, joined up in a new league headed by Athens for mutual defense against Sparta, known as the Second Athenian Confederacy.¹⁷ After Thebes dealt Sparta a decisive defeat at Leuctra in 371 and effectively ended the threat of Spartan imperialism, the Athenians again became increasingly domineering in their treatment of their allies. Further political shifts over the next decade eventually saw Athens and Sparta ally against the newly ascendant Thebes. An indecisive battle at Mantinea in 362 left all sides weakened.¹⁸

A young prince of Macedonia, Philip, was a hostage in Thebes between 368 and 365, during the height of Theban power. Macedonia was in disarray as several claimants to the throne, many of them backed by Greek cities such as Athens and Thebes, struggled for control of the country. Sending out younger sons as hostages was one way in which the Macedonian elite managed their relationships with the Greeks. Philip observed both the innovative Theban tactics that had defeated Sparta and the political maneuvers by which the Thebans had built their hegemony in central Greece. On returning to Macedonia, he put these lessons to good use. He claimed the throne for {86} himself in 359 as Philip II and rapidly stabilized the country, rebuilt its army, and began conquering its neighbors.

In 358 Artaxerxes II died and was succeeded by his son Artaxerxes III. Satraps in frontier areas were accustomed to a degree of autonomy, and several Anatolian satraps had outright rebelled against Artaxerxes II in the late 370s and 360s.¹⁹

The new king attempted to rein in his subordinates. Some western satraps continued to expand their personal power bases while others fomented a new revolt. Amid the tangled politics of the next few years, Athens allied with the rebel satrap Artabazus to try to keep hold of its confederacy against the ambitions of Mausolus, another satrap. While Athens was distracted with these problems, Philip took control of several Athenian possessions in the northern Aegean. When Artaxerxes III threatened to attack Athens for its role in supporting the rebellion, Athens had no choice but to back down. The Second Confederacy continued to exist in a formal sense but ceased to be a meaningful political or military force.²⁰

Greece was once again in disarray, and in 343 Artaxerxes turned his attention to Egypt, which had been independent since a revolt in 402. To prevent any Greek interference in his campaign, Artaxerxes sent emissaries to the major cities of Greece to secure promises of neutrality and recruit mercenaries.²¹ Philip meanwhile took advantage of the exhaustion and distraction of other forces in the region to continue his conquests. By 341 Artaxerxes' attention was back on the Aegean, where he saw Macedonia as a rising threat to local stability. Overtures were made toward a Persian-Athenian alliance against Macedonia, but these efforts came too late. Philip dispelled the last Greek opposition in 338 with a decisive battle at Chaeronea. The Macedonian conquest of Greece was complete (except for Sparta, a much reduced power that Philip was content to leave alone). Macedonian rule was formalized with the founding of a new league, known to historians as the League of Corinth. Artaxerxes died in the same year, and his successor fell victim to a coup two years later. The turmoil in the Persian court delayed any response to the situation in the Aegean.²²

Philip almost immediately began plans for a campaign in Anatolia. Despite his use of anti-Persian propaganda to rally Greek support, it is unlikely he intended to do more than conquer the Aegean coast.²³ Before he could launch {87} this campaign, however, Philip was assassinated, and his kingdom and army fell to his more ambitious son, Alexander III.

The rise of Macedonia was unexpected, but the direction in which it expanded was no surprise. In advancing first against Greece and then against Persia, Macedonia was working its way up the chains of political and economic influence to which the region had long been connected. Macedonia had a history of ties to Greece, and both were in the orbit of the Persian Empire.

Greekness and the Macedonians

The arrival of Macedonia as a major power on the Aegean scene added further complications to the arguments over what it meant to be Greek. There is no meaningful answer to the question of whether ancient Macedonians were in any objective sense Greek because “Greek” was not an objectively defined category.²⁴

Before the Greco-Persian Wars of the early fifth century, Greek literature

tended to approach the question of Greek identity on the basis of ancestry. After the wars, a shift can be seen toward arguments based on culture.²⁵ The anonymous sixth-century poem *The Catalog of Women*, for example, laid out a detailed genealogy of the mythical ancestors of the Greeks. Only those whose ancestry included Hellen (a son of Zeus and Pyrrha, not to be confused with the beautiful Helen of Trojan War fame) were counted among the Greeks, or Hellenes. Other peoples of the Aegean world, such as the Macedonians, Aetolians, and Magnesians, were excluded on the grounds that they were descendants of Hellen's siblings, not Hellen himself.²⁶ Herodotus, writing in the fifth century, mentioned not just kinship but also language, shared religious traditions, and ways of life as the things that bound the Greeks together.²⁷ In the fourth century, the orator Isocrates dismissed common ancestry as the defining criterion for Greekness and argued that Greeks were those who shared in Greek culture and education.²⁸

These ways of assessing ethnicity were always open to debate and reinterpretation. For those who held onto the principle of ancestry, lines of ethnicity could be redrawn by offering alternative genealogies. In contrast to the claims of *The Catalog of Women*, later myths rearranged the family tree to make other peoples descendants of Hellen.²⁹ Greeks also had a long-standing habit of inventing genealogies for foreign peoples that included figures of Greek myth. Peoples as diverse as the Lydians, Scythians, and Sicilians—even Persians—could be fitted into Greek schemes of ancestry.³⁰ Genealogical arguments could also be used to exclude people. Political agitation against the Athenian generals Cimon and Themistocles included charges that their mothers were not Greeks.³¹ Foreign peoples could engage in similar arguments about their relationships with the Greeks. According to Herodotus, Xerxes appealed to the Persians' supposed common ancestry with the people of Argos, through the Argive hero Perseus, to persuade the Argives to remain neutral during his invasion.³² Cultural judgments of Greekness were equally flexible. Accusations that the Spartan general Pausanias was conspiring with Xerxes were backed up by allegations that he had begun dressing in Median clothes, surrounding himself with Median and Egyptian bodyguards, and presiding over Persian-style feasts.³³ By contrast, Herodotus illustrated the Egyptian pharaoh Amasis' friendly attitude toward Greece by emphasizing his Greek-like qualities, such as a skeptical inquisitiveness about the world and a cautious awareness of life's changeability.³⁴

Since most of the surviving sources that address the question of Greek identity were written either by Athenians, such as Thucydides and Isocrates, or by people connected to the Athenian intellectual milieu, such as Herodotus and Aristotle, we must see them in the context of Athenian political and social life. Many of the major concerns for Athenians in the fifth and fourth centuries involved questions of identity. Ambitious Greek aristocrats traditionally sought advantageous marriages with powerful families abroad, whether in other Greek cities or among peoples such as the Thracians or Persians. To curb the influence of such aristocratic families, Athenian democrats pushed for exclusionary citizenship

policies and encouraged a culture of Athenian nativism.³⁵ At the same time, Athens was tangled in the scramble for dominance over the Greek world, competing against Sparta and Thebes to build an {89} empire of subject poleis. Meanwhile, Persia loomed in the distance, at once a potential ally and a lingering threat.³⁶

It is against this background that we must see the arguments over whether the Macedonians were Greeks or barbarians. Ancient Macedonia was a vaguely defined region with unstable borders and a landscape that varied from coastal plain to mountainous interior. From its earliest appearance in written sources, the land was ruled by a king, but the king's power depended greatly on the strength of his relationships with the noble families whose warrior followers made up the bulk of the Macedonian army. Some Macedonian kings married multiple wives as a way of strengthening their relationships both within and outside the kingdom.³⁷ Macedonian culture and politics had much in common with those of neighboring peoples such as Thessalians, Thracians, and Epirotes.

At least as early as the sixth century, kings of Macedonia showed an interest in closer ties with the Greeks to their south, encouraged by both the pressures of Persian expansion and the Athenian demand for timber. In the early fifth century, Athens named King Alexander I of Macedonia a *proxenos*, or official friend of the city, an honor typically only granted to fellow Greeks.³⁸ More explicit was Alexander's argument that he ought to be allowed to participate in the Greeks-only Olympic Games. He asserted that the royal family of Macedonia were descendants of the Greek hero Heracles, which made him a Greek by descent.³⁹ This incident suggests on one hand that Macedonians were not normally regarded as Greeks at the time, but on the other that Alexander was well versed in contemporary Greek theories of identity.

For the first few decades of the fifth century, Macedonia was a vassal of Persia. The Persians evidently regarded the Macedonians as a variety of Greeks, since they applied the same word, *Yauna*, to both. Just as Persian sources distinguished Ionians, or "Yauna by the sea," from mainland Greeks, or "Yauna across the sea," they also distinguished the Macedonians as "Yauna who wear shield-shaped hats," a reference to the traditional flat-round Macedonian hat called a *kausia*.⁴⁰ Equating Macedonians and Greeks served political purposes for the Persians as well, since if Ionians and Macedonians already paid tribute to the Persian king, then it was only natural that their cousins "across the sea" should do the same.

{90} Persian dominion over Macedonia was lost after 480, but the memory that Macedonians had marched with Xerxes' troops colored Greek perceptions of the kingdom for the rest of the fifth century. King Perdiccas II's frequent shifts of loyalty during the Peloponnesian War did nothing to help Macedonia's reputation. By this time, Greek thought had largely turned against monarchic rulers like the Persian kings and Greek tyrants, and the Macedonian kings began to seem suspect as well. The practice of royal polygamy likewise smacked of barbarism.⁴¹ Herodotus and Thucydides both expressed mixed feelings about Macedonia. Herodotus made a point of affirming Alexander I's Greek ancestry,

perceiving that his late fifth-century audience might be skeptical.⁴² Thucydides accepted the Greekness of the Macedonian kings, but he suggested that the Macedonian people themselves were barbarians, or at best perhaps somewhere between barbarian and Greek.⁴³

Philip II's reforms in the fourth century drew in part on Greek models, such as Theban military tactics. As he consolidated his control in the northern Aegean and began to extend his dominion south, Philip remained sensitive to popular Greek opinion. When he forced the Greek cities to submit to his rule, the official line was that the Greeks (minus Sparta) had formed a new league, independently elected Philip as their military commander, and declared a war of vengeance on Persia. The reality of Macedonian domination was cloaked in traditional Greek political forms and anti-Persian patriotism.⁴⁴

Other elements of Philip's rule had Persian precedents. His reorganization of the royal bureaucracy followed Persian patterns, as did his propagandistic use of royal hunts. The institution of the "pages," sons of noble families who were gathered to the royal court both for their education under the new regime and as hostages for their families' good behavior, also had Persian inspiration.⁴⁵ Although Philip presented the League of Corinth as a Greek institution, the use of peace treaties and diplomacy to manage the volatile politics of the Greek cities was a typical Persian tactic.⁴⁶

By the late fourth century, when Macedonian power was starting to impinge on southern Greece, Athenians were split over how to respond. {91} One faction campaigned for an alliance with Persia against Macedonia. Their spokesman, Demosthenes, gave a string of fiery speeches in which he decried the Macedonians as barbarians and Philip as a tyrant.⁴⁷ The opposing side favored allying with the Macedonians against Persia and was represented by Isocrates, who praised Philip's Greek *bona fides*.⁴⁸

Greeks had always been ambivalent toward Macedonia, and their opinions on the Greekness of their northern neighbors were no less politically determined than modern debates over ethnicity and nationality are. The same arguments that Greeks engaged in about Macedonians could also be applied to Persians. From the Persian perspective, Greeks and Macedonians were similarly interchangeable. Since almost nothing survives of Macedonian writings from before Alexander's conquest, we have little evidence for how Macedonians of Philip's day thought about Greeks and Persians, but Philip was prepared to learn from and campaign against both.

The Interconnected Aegean World

Greece and Macedonia were linked to one another and to the western Persian provinces by politics, economics, and long-standing personal ties. With the rise of inter-polis alliances such as the Delian and Peloponnesian Leagues, the Greek world became even more interconnected. As the Persians turned to diplomatic

strategies for managing their Aegean frontier, they likewise encouraged the creation of useful relationships across boundaries. Macedonia engaged with both Greece and Persia in many of the same ways. These connections drew the Aegean world ever closer together.

Alexander I's Greek connections made him useful to Xerxes as an ambassador to the Greeks.⁴⁹ After the war, the use of intermediaries continued as the Persian kings and their Anatolian satraps sought to influence affairs in the Greek cities. Some of the relationships created this way were close ones. The friendship between Cyrus and Lysander was so strong, for example, that when Cyrus was recalled to attend on his ill father, he left his personal funds in Lysander's hands to carry on the war effort.⁵⁰ To support the anti-Spartan allies at the outset of the Corinthian War, Pharnabazus, one of the Anatolian satraps, not only provided money but also raised a fleet of warships from Cyprus and Phoenicia. The Athenian admiral Conon, who had lived in self-imposed exile on Cyprus since losing a major battle at the end of the Peloponnesian War, was recruited to assist in commanding the fleet. After {92} crushing the Spartan navy, Pharnabazus entrusted Conon with command of the fleet to continue the campaign.⁵¹

Individuals also saw opportunities for themselves in reaching across the lines. Pausanias, the Spartan general who led the Greek allies to victory at Plataea in 479, was accused of colluding with Xerxes after the war to bring Greece under Persian rule in return for marriage to one of the king's daughters.⁵² The suggestion that Themistocles, the Athenian commander behind the Greek victory at Salamis, was also in on this plot appears to have been just a political slur, but when his opponents hounded him out of Athens, Themistocles escaped to Persia where he spent the rest of his life in the king's service.⁵³ Zopyrus, grandson of a famous Persian general by the same name, found refuge in Athens when he fell out of favor in Persia.⁵⁴ The rebel satrap Artabazus, abandoned by his Greek allies in 355, fled to the Macedonian court.⁵⁵ The Athenian general Cimon was accused of taking bribes from the king of Macedonia, though he was acquitted of the charge.⁵⁶ Amminapes, a Persian general originally from the region of Parthia, was exiled by Artaxerxes III and found refuge in Macedonia. Later he was restored to favor in Persia and sent to Egypt. When Alexander the Great came to Egypt, Amminapes helped coordinate the peaceful surrender of the territory. He joined the Macedonian forces and was eventually appointed satrap of Parthia.⁵⁷

It was not only those at the height of political power who moved around the Aegean world. In the fifth and fourth centuries, mercenaries, courtesans, artisans, and other professionals continued to circulate between Greek cities, the courts of Macedonia and Thrace, and the Persian Empire, much as they had done for generations.⁵⁸ The Athenian dramatist Euripides visited the Macedonian court and, according to some sources, spent the last years of his life there.⁵⁹ The philosopher Aristotle had a similarly mobile life. Though he was born in the Greek city Stageira, his father was physician to the king of Macedonia, and Aristotle likely spent some time at the Macedonian court as a child. As a young man, he went to Athens to study under Plato, who had himself traveled widely in

the Mediterranean following the execution of his mentor Socrates. One of Aristotle's fellow students was Hermias, the slave of Eubulus, a rich banker who had acquired control of the city of Atarneus {93} in Anatolia as security for a loan to a Persian official. Hermias later returned to Atarneus and succeeded Eubulus as ruler of the city. When Aristotle left Athens amid growing anti-Macedonian sentiment, he went to Atarneus as an adviser to Hermias. There he married Pythias, Hermias' niece and a fellow naturalist. After Hermias' death, Aristotle was invited to become tutor to the children of the Macedonian court, including the young Alexander.⁶⁰

The brothers Mentor and Memnon from Rhodes had even more complicated experiences. They were recruited by the satrap Artabazus to help lead his revolt against Artaxerxes III in 356. To seal the deal, Artabazus married their sister and each of the brothers married one of Artabazus' daughters. When the rebellion failed, Memnon, along with Mentor's wife Barsine, fled with Artabazus to Macedonia to the court of Philip II. Mentor, meanwhile, went to Egypt—currently independent but under threat of a new Persian invasion—and offered his services to Pharaoh Nectanebo II. There he led mercenary troops against the Persians but was captured. Artaxerxes, recognizing talent when he saw it, pardoned Mentor and gave him a command in the Persian forces invading Egypt. After Egypt had been reconquered, Artaxerxes tasked Mentor with managing military affairs in the Aegean. One of Mentor's acts was to procure the pardon of Artabazus and allow him, along with Memnon and Barsine, to return to Persian-controlled Anatolia. Mentor died a few years later in 340, but his brother Memnon was appointed to take over his position and Barsine married him. When Alexander began his campaign in Anatolia, Memnon advised the Persian satraps in their response and led the mercenary forces in the first major battle. The family's wanderings continued after the brothers' death when Barsine became one of Alexander's mistresses, and her daughter by Mentor married Nearchus, Alexander's Cretan admiral.⁶¹

The experiences of individuals like these reflect the connections that linked all sides of the Aegean world and tied that world to Persia. Even those who feared or rejected such connections, such as the Spartans who condemned Pausanias to death for conspiring with the Persians, were bound up in them. The decisions of Greek politicians, Macedonian kings, and Persian satraps were made in the context of this interconnected world.

Alexander and Persia

There are few people in history who have been as thoroughly mythologized as Alexander III of Macedonia, or Alexander the Great. Like many political {94} leaders before and after him, he was highly conscious of his public image and encouraged the myth making. Only fragments of contemporary sources have survived, and we are dependent on later writers, many of whom were more

interested in the heroic legend than the person behind it.⁶² Nevertheless, the ways in which Alexander presented himself to the peoples over whom he ruled in themselves tell us much about the relationships among Macedonians, Greeks, and Persians.

On Philip II's death in 336, Alexander inherited his father's throne, army, and plans, but he spent his first couple of years consolidating his power and fighting incursions of Thracians and Illyrians on Macedonia's borders. When Alexander was busy with this northern campaign, Thebes rebelled. The response was swift and brutal. The revolt was crushed, Thebes was razed, and its people were sold into slavery.

Alexander then returned to his father's plans for a campaign in Anatolia. He crossed the Aegean with an army of Macedonians and Greeks. Memnon of Rhodes, in command of the defense of Anatolia for King Darius III, proposed falling back, consolidating Persian forces, and burning the land behind them to deny food and resources to the Macedonians, but the satraps of Anatolia rejected his plan and preferred to meet Alexander head on, hoping to stop his campaign with one swift stroke. At the Granicus River in northwestern Anatolia, they almost succeeded. Alexander led his army from the front in heroic style, and when he charged the Persian lines, one Persian dazed him and almost killed him with a blow to the head. Only the swift intervention of one of Alexander's companions, Cleitus the Black, saved him from Cyrus' fate.⁶³

The defeat of the Persian forces at the Granicus left the rest of Anatolia largely undefended, and most cities surrendered to Alexander without a fight. Realizing the severity of the threat, Darius assembled his army and met Alexander at Issus, on the border between the Anatolian peninsula and the Syrian coast. The battle again went badly for the Persians, and Darius had to flee the battlefield, leaving behind his campaign treasury and the women of his household. Darius then offered to make peace, on terms that included giving one of his daughters to Alexander in marriage and splitting the rule of the Persian Empire with him. Parmenion, a veteran general who had been Philip's second in command and continued in the same position under Alexander, urged his king to accept the treaty, but Alexander refused.⁶⁴

Darius' offer, Parmenion's advice, and Alexander's response represent different conceptions of how Macedonia related the Persian Empire. Darius was from a lesser branch of the Achaemenid royal family and had come to power {95} in a period of unrest after the death of one king and the assassination of the next. Before his rise to power, he had distinguished himself as a general, satrap of Armenia, and overseer of the royal messengers.⁶⁵ His offer to Alexander suggests that he saw the Macedonian king as someone much like himself: a leader who had risen from the outer reaches of the empire and aspired to be at its center. His offer of an alliance between their families may have been made in desperation, but there is no reason to think it was not sincere. Individuals of skill and ambition from the fringes of the empire had risen in its administration, such as Themistocles and Memnon, and political marriages were common in the Persian

royal family.⁶⁶ It is not hard to believe that in Darius' eyes, bringing Alexander into the fold was a reasonable solution.

Parmenion represented the interests of the Macedonian nobility and the memory of Philip II. His clash with Alexander over Darius' proposal is the clearest evidence that Alexander had exceeded his father's ambitions.⁶⁷ Parmenion did not envision the total conquest of Persia but rather the decisive ouster of Persian influence from western Anatolia. Macedonia would be left with an unchallenged hegemony over Greece and the Aegean. Alexander, however, would have none of these plans and determined to conquer all of Persia for himself. While Alexander's ambition was more grandiose than Darius or Parmenion imagined, it was not revolutionary. His goals were not much different from Xerxes' and Cyrus the Younger's.

After his victory at Issus, Alexander did not immediately pursue Darius but spent the next year conquering the eastern Mediterranean coast and Egypt. The cities of Tyre and Gaza resisted and had to be captured by siege, but Egypt had long chafed under Persian rule. Alexander was greeted as a liberator there, and the local Persian leadership surrendered peacefully. In time, Egyptians would come to resent Macedonian rule as much as they had resented Persia, but in the short term the change of administration was welcome, and Alexander was crowned Pharaoh.

Alexander's interest in Egypt was at least partly personal. While the country was not without strategic value, his greatest aim there seems to have been to consult the oracle at the Siwa Oasis.⁶⁸ The oracle declared him the son of Ammon, a local version of the Egyptian god Amun whom Greeks equated with Zeus. This new identity became central to Alexander's image, and he began to present himself not as the son of Philip but as the child of Zeus.⁶⁹

{96} Darius, meanwhile, was regrouping and attempting to cause problems behind the lines for Alexander by channeling money to King Agis of Sparta who was leading an anti-Macedonian resistance.⁷⁰ These plans, however, came to nothing as the revolt in Greece was suppressed. After his detour to Egypt, Alexander resumed his conquest of Persia. When his forces met Darius' again at Gaugamela, the result was the same as at Issus: Alexander was victorious, and Darius fled the field. While attempting to regroup his army for another stand, Darius was killed in a coup. In the ensuing confusion, Persian resistance fell apart, and Alexander assumed unchallenged control of the kingdom.

In victory, Alexander showed that he intended not to destroy the Persian Empire but to take it over. While continuing to govern his army and Macedonian subjects in accordance with Macedonian traditions, he preserved much of the Persian Empire's practical machinery and court symbolism. He appointed Persians to manage his court and to govern large parts of the territory he had conquered. He adopted elements of Achaemenid court protocol and royal regalia. He recruited Persians to be trained in the Macedonian fighting style and become part of his army, and he even included the sons of Persian noble families among his personal guard.⁷¹ These accommodations were practical, often

improvisational attempts to ensure stability in the enormous new empire by incorporating rather than subjugating its peoples.⁷²

Figuring out how to combine Persian and Macedonian elements in both practical governance and royal symbolism was one of the persistent problems of Alexander's reign. Many of these developments were poorly received by the Greeks and Macedonians in his company, especially the ritual called *proskynesis*. The nature of *proskynesis* is debated, but it may have involved full prostration on the ground before the king or simply a formal bow with a blown kiss. In either case, it was an act that in the Greek world was considered a religious gesture, and Greeks interpreted Alexander's insistence on it as a demand for the honors due to a god, not a king. Facing resistance from his followers, Alexander dropped the practice from court protocol.⁷³ Tensions over Alexander's adoption of Persian ways came to a head in 328 at a drinking [97] party when Cleitus, who had saved Alexander's life at the Granicus, began to argue with the king over his use of Persian customs and elevation of Persian officials. The argument grew so heated that other members of the party separated the two men and sent Cleitus away, but when Cleitus later returned and started haranguing Alexander again, Alexander grabbed a spear, threw it at Cleitus, and struck him dead.⁷⁴

The attempt to institute *proskynesis* and the murder of Cleitus became two of the key incidents in a Greek narrative that accused Alexander of succumbing to *hybris*, the defining fault of tragic heroes who believe that the rules of the mortal world do not apply to them. Greeks who had once embraced the idea of an anti-Persian campaign began to regard Alexander as a fallen hero corrupted by luxury and the desire for power.⁷⁵ In later Greek and Roman literature, admiration for Alexander's military achievements is mingled with revulsion at his moral failings.

Persian sources offer equally mixed reactions. As in Greece, few contemporary Persian sources on Alexander survive, but he figures in later sources that transmitted older traditions. One such tradition appears in the literature of Zoroastrianism, a development of ancestral Iranian religion, which portrays Alexander as a terrible destroyer: "He killed the Iranian ruler and destroyed and ruined the court and the sovereignty. That wicked, wretched, heretic, sinful, maleficent Alexander . . . took away and burnt those [Zoroastrian] scriptures."⁷⁶ A different approach sought not to condemn Alexander but to co-opt him for Persia. According to legends preserved in oral literature and recorded by the medieval Iranian poet Firdousi, Alexander was not Philip's son but the son of Philip's daughter and Darius III's father, the product of a brief marriage that ended when the Macedonian princess was sent home, unknowingly pregnant. Alexander was thus not a foreign conqueror but the rightful heir to the Achaemenid throne.⁷⁷ In other medieval Persian narratives Alexander was reimagined as an enlightened philosopher-king and champion of justice.⁷⁸

{98} The ambiguities in the traditions about Alexander are telling. As far back as Alexander I, Macedonian kings had been practicing a cultural chameleonism encouraged by their position at the edge of both the Greek and Persian worlds. By the time of Philip II, they had become experts at adapting their public image

to political needs. When Philip and Alexander presented themselves to their Greek subjects as heroic leaders of the allied Greeks in their war of vengeance on Persia, they were simply playing to their audience. When Alexander adopted the manners of an Achaemenid king in order to better secure his rule of Persia, he was doing the same thing.

From beyond the Persian Frontier

Many historians from the first century BCE to the twenty-first century CE have credited Alexander's conquest of Persia with near-cosmic significance. It was seen as a companion piece to Xerxes' invasion of Greece, a clash between the bold, free, dynamic West and the cowardly, despotic, decadent East. This vision, however, is little more than a mirage.

Alexander was no democrat, and the burned ruins of Thebes testify to the lack of freedom among those he ruled. While Alexander had an exceptional ability to perceive the tactical weaknesses in his opponents on the battlefield and cannot be faulted for lack of initiative, a large part of his success depended on Philip's hard work redesigning the Macedonian army, the excellent logistical work of his staff, and no small measure of luck.⁷⁹ The Persians were no pushovers. The Anatolian satraps' daring choice to confront Alexander's army almost succeeded. Darius III suffered two major tactical defeats, but he was at least Alexander's equal as a strategist. The popular image of Darius fleeing from battle in panic is as much propaganda as reality.⁸⁰ The greatest impediment to the Persian Empire's response to Alexander was a lack of coordination between different levels of administration, not an excess of monarchic authority.

More importantly, Macedonia and Persia were not opposing civilizations. Like Greece, Macedonia had lived within the orbit of the Persian Empire for centuries. The political, economic, cultural, and personal bonds that connected the Aegean world to Persia's western frontier had only grown stronger {99} over time. The rise of Macedonia was in part a side effect of Persian policies. Persian aggression and Persian-sponsored inter-polis warfare in the Aegean drove the Greek demand for timber, which in turn spurred the development of the Macedonian economy. Persian interference prevented the creation of a stable Greek hegemony in the Aegean that could have contained Macedonian expansion. Pausanias, Themistocles, Memnon, and others had demonstrated that Persians were prepared to work with and for ambitious leaders from the Aegean world. Cyrus the Younger had shown that an invasion from the frontier had a chance at seizing the Persian throne, provided its leader survived the attempt. Philip's reforms in Macedonia owed much to Persian developments, while Alexander, in governing the peoples he conquered through the cultural forms they were familiar with, was following a model the Persians had perfected. Macedonia was a wayward vassal of Persia, and Alexander had grown up in a court that welcomed Persian exiles as readily as wandering Greeks. Alexander's campaign may have come from beyond

the edge of the empire, but it was deeply embedded in the Persian world.

There was no bright line that separated the Aegean from Persia or Macedonia from Greece. They were connected by age-old patterns of migration and trade, and by the ever-unstable politics of an imperial frontier. It was no fated clash of East and West that drew Alexander's army into Persia. He was following the channels of power and influence to which Macedonia and Greece had been connected for centuries.

1. The details, including the Greek mercenaries' long and arduous march home, are recorded in Xenophon, *Anabasis*.

2. Herodotus, *Histories* 5.17–19, 5.23, 6.44.

3. Thucydides, *History* 1.104–10; Stephen Ruzicka, *Trouble in the West: Egypt and the Persian Empire, 525–332* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 30–34.

4. Historians since antiquity have debated whether this treaty ever existed. See Demosthenes, *Speeches* 19.273; Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 12.4.5. Note that Thucydides makes no reference to such an agreement when he discusses the period. See Thucydides 1.89–117; Loren J. Samons II, "Kimon, Kallias, and Peace with Persia," *Historia* 47, no. 2 (1998): 129–40.

5. Eugene N. Borza, "Timber and Politics in the Ancient World: Macedonia and the Greeks," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 131, no. 1 (March 1987): 35–52; Lisa Kallet, "The Origins of the Athenian Economic Arche," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 133 (2013): 43–60.

6. Sławomir Sprawski, "The Early Temenid Kings to Alexander I," in *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia*, ed. Joseph Roisman and Ian Worthington (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010), 145–65, esp. 134–38.

7. Herodotus 7.185, 8.34, 8.136, 8.140–43, 9.1.

8. Robert M. Errington, "Alexander the Philhellene and Persia," in *Ancient Macedonian Studies in Honor of Charles F. Edson*, ed. H. J. Dell (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1981), 139–43.

9. Herodotus 5.17–21. See Ross Scaife, "Alexander I in the Histories of Herodotos," *Hermes* 117, no. 2 (1989): 129–37.

10. Thucydides 8.26, 8.52–58.

11. David M. Lewis, *Sparta and Persia* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 108–35.

12. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.5, 2.1.13–14.

13. *Ibid.*, 3.1.3–4.

14. *Ibid.*, 3.5.1–2; *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*.

15. Jon E. Lendon, "The Oxyrhynchus Historian and the Origins of the Corinthian War," *Historia* 38, no. 3 (1989): 300–313.

16. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 5.1.31.

17. Christopher A. Baron, "The Aristoteles Decree and the Expansion of the Second Athenian League," *Hesperia* 75, no. 3 (July–September 2006): 379–95. The naming of alliances such as these is not always consistent in modern scholarship. Most had no official name in antiquity, and terms such as "Second Athenian Confederacy" or "Second Athenian League" are conventional modern ways of referring to political arrangements that were not always stable or well defined.

18. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 6.4.1–26, 7.5; Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 15.46–56.

19. Brosius, *Persians*, 28–29.

20. George Cawkwell, "Notes on the Failure of the Second Athenian Confederacy," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 101 (1981): 40–55.

21. Demosthenes, *Speeches* 10.34; Diodorus of Sicily 16.44; Edward M. Harris, "More

- Chalcentric Negligence," *Classical Philology* 84, no. 1 (January 1989): 36–44.
22. Brosius, *Persians*, 31.
23. Diodorus of Sicily 16.89; Ian Worthington, *Philip II of Macedonia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 167–70; Sabine Müller, "Philip II," in Roisman and Worthington, *Ancient Macedonia*, 166–85, esp. 177–79. Compare Polybius' analysis of the causes of the war in *Roman History* 3.6.12–13.
24. See Loring M. Danforth, *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).
25. Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity*, 172–220.
26. *Catalogue of Women*; Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity*, 25–27.
27. Herodotus 8.144.
28. Isocrates, *Panegyric* 50.
29. For example, the Macedonians: Hellanicus of Lesbos, *The Priestess of Hera at Argos* (cited in Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Thematribus* 2.2 = Jacoby 4FGrH74); the Molossians: compare Thucydides 2.80.5–6 and Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.11.1. See Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity*, 154–68.
30. Herodotus 1.7, 4.8–10, 5.43, 7.61; Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 253–67.
31. Margaret C. Miller, *Athens and Persia*, 252–53.
32. Herodotus 7.150.
33. Thucydides 1.130.
34. Herodotus 2.172–82. Also compare Amasis' advice to Polycrates with Solon's advice to Croesus: 1.30–33, 3.40–43.
35. Sara Forsdyke, "Exile, Ostracism, and the Athenian Democracy," *Classical Antiquity* 19, no. 2 (October 2000): 232–63; Josine H. Blok, "Perikles' Citizenship Law: A New Perspective," *Historia* 58, no. 2 (2009): 141–70; Demetra Kasimis, "The Tragedy of Blood-Based Membership: Secrecy and the Politics of Immigration in Euripides' *Ion*," *Political Theory* 41, no. 2 (April 2013): 231–56.
36. Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity*, 199–205.
37. Elizabeth Carney, "Macedonian Women," in Roisman and Worthington, *Ancient Macedonia*, 409–27, esp. 415; Carol G. Thomas, "The Physical Kingdom," in Roisman and Worthington, *Ancient Macedonia*, 65–80.
38. Herodotus 8.143; M. B. Wallace, "Early Greek 'Proxenoí,'" *Phoenix* 24, no. 3 (Autumn 1970): 189–208.
39. Herodotus 5.22.
40. Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "Yauna by the Sea and across the Sea," in *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*, ed. Irad Malkin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 323–46.
41. Sulochana Asirvatham, "Perspectives on the Macedonians from Greece, Rome, and Beyond," in Roisman and Worthington, *Ancient Macedonia*, 99–124, esp. 100–104.
42. Herodotus 5.22, 8.137–39.
43. Thucydides 2.99, 4.124.
44. Samuel Perlman, "Panhellenism, the Polis, and Imperialism," *Historia* 25, no. 1 (1976): 1–30; Müller, "Philip II."
45. Marek Jan Olbrycht, "Macedonia and Persia," in Roisman and Worthington, *Ancient Macedonia*, 342–69; Noriko Sawada, "Social Customs and Institutions: Aspects of Macedonian Elite Society," in Roisman and Worthington, *Ancient Macedonia*, 392–408.
46. Kurt A. Raaflaub, "Conceptualizing and Theorizing Peace in Ancient Greece," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 139, no. 2 (Autumn 2009): 225–50. Cf. Anna Missiou-Ladi, "Coercive Diplomacy in Greek Interstate Relations," *Classical Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1987): 336–45.
47. See particularly Demosthenes, *Speeches* 3, 9.
48. Isocrates, *To Philip*.
49. Herodotus 8.136, 8.140–43, 9.1.
50. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.5, 2.1.13–14.

51. Ibid., 4.3.11–12.
52. Thucydides, *History* 1.128–30, 1.133.
53. Ibid., 1.137–38; Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Life of Themistocles,” 24–31.
54. Herodotus 3.160.
55. Brosius, *Persians*, 29.
56. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Life of Cimon,” 14.
57. Curtius, *Histories of Alexander the Great* 6.4.25; Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.22.1.
58. Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 51–52.
59. Scott Scullion, “Euripides and Macedonia, or the Silence of the ‘Frogs,’” *Classical Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2003): 389–400.
60. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* 5.1; Georgios Anagnostopoulos, *A Companion to Aristotle* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
61. Demosthenes, *Speeches* 23.157; Diodorus of Sicily 16.42–52; Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.4.6; Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 72.
62. Dawn L. Gilley and Ian Worthington, “Alexander the Great, Macedonia and Asia,” in Roisman and Worthington, *Ancient Macedonia*, 186–207.
63. Arrian, *Anabasis* 1.12–16.
64. Diodorus of Sicily 17.54; Curtius 4.11; Arrian 2.25; Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Life of Alexander” 29.
65. Brosius, *Persians*, 31.
66. Esther; Herodotus 1.108; Ctesias, *Persica* 7 (abridged in Photius, *Bibliotheca*); Matt Waters, “Cyrus and the Achaemenids,” *Iran* 42 (2004): 91–102.
67. Müller, “Philip II,” 179.
68. Edmund F. Bloedow, “Egypt in Alexander’s Scheme of Things,” *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, n.s., 77, no. 2 (2004): 75–99.
69. Margarete Bieber, “The Portraits of Alexander,” *Greece and Rome* 12, no. 2 (October 1965): 183–88; Ernst A. Fredricksmeyer, “Alexander, Zeus Ammon, and the Conquest of Asia,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 121 (1991): 199–214.
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71. Olbrycht, “Macedonia and Persia,” 355–66; Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 65–75.
72. Albert B. Bosworth, “Alexander and the Iranians,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 100 (1980): 1–21; Alessandra Coppola, “Alexander’s Court,” in *Der Achämenidenhof. The Achaemenid Court: Akten des 2. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum Thema “Vorderasien im Spannungsfeld klassischer und altorientalischer Überlieferungen” Landgut Castelen bei Basel, 23.–25. Mai 2007*, ed. Bruno Jacobs and Robert Rollinger (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 139–52.
73. Lily Ross Taylor, “The ‘Proskynesis’ and the Hellenistic Ruler Cult,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 47, part 1 (1927): 53–62; Elizabeth Carney, “The Conspiracy of Hermolaus,” *Classical Journal* 76, no. 3 (February–March 1983): 223–31; Brosius, *Persians*, 36.
74. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Life of Alexander,” 50–51; Arrian, *Anabasis* 4.8.
75. Elizabeth Donnelly Carney, “Alexander and Persian Women,” *American Journal of Philology* 117, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 563–83; Tim Whitmarsh, “Alexander’s Hellenism and Plutarch’s Textualism,” *Classical Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2002): 174–92.
76. *Ardā Virāz Nāmag* 1.3, translation from Faridūn Vahman, *Ardā Virāz Nāmag: The Iranian “Divina Comedia”* (London: Routledge, 2017), 31.
77. Firdousi, *Shah-Nameh* (also spelled Ferdousi or Firdawsi). See Alireza Shapour Shahbazi, “Irano-Hellenic Notes: 3. Iranians and Alexander,” *American Journal of Ancient History* 2, no. 1 (2003): 5–38; Dan-Tudor Ionescu, “Alexander the Great in the Persian Legends: From Alexander of Macedon to Sikandar. The Circulation of Mythical *Topoi* between the Greek Alexander Romance and Firdousi’s *Shah-Nameh*,” *Chaos e Kosmos* 14 (2013): 1–22.
78. Nizami, *Iqbalnameh*. See Cyrus Masroori, “Alexander in the City of the Excellent: A Persian Tradition of Utopia,” *Utopian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2013): 52–65.
79. Donald W. Engels, *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Gilley and Worthington, “Alexander the Great”; Nicholas

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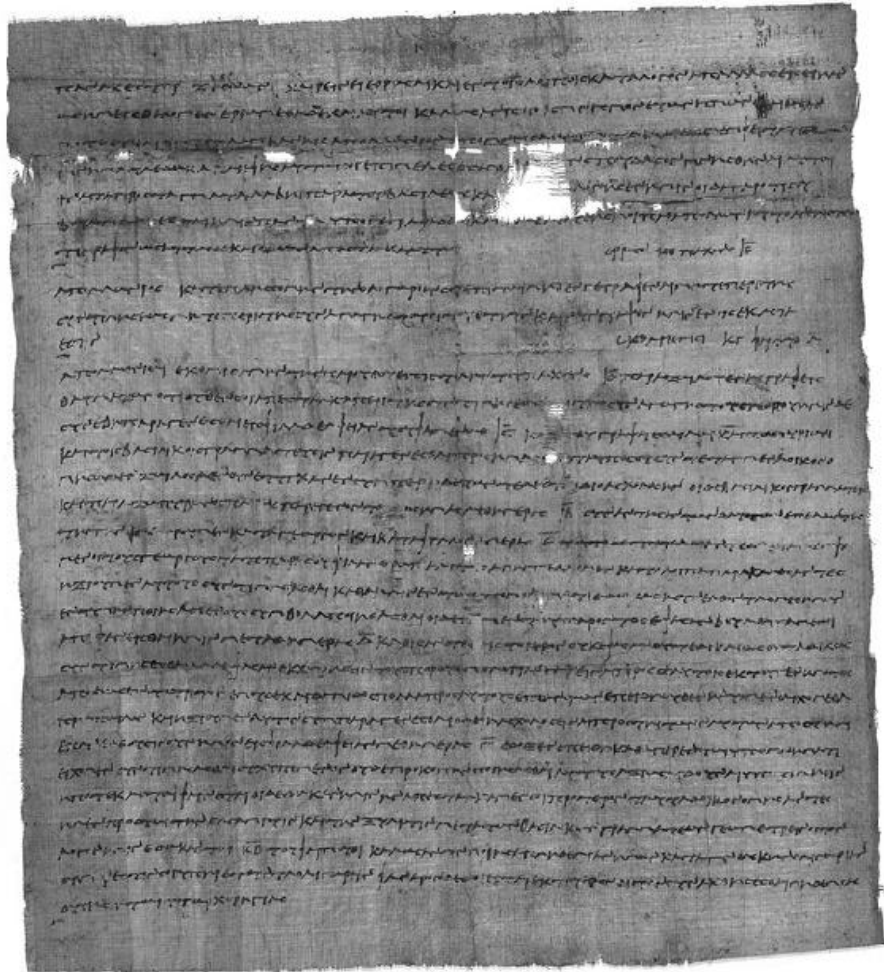
THE HELLENISTIC ERA

The period from 323 BCE, when Alexander the Great died, to 30 BCE, when Rome conquered the last independent Macedonian kingdom, is known as the “Hellenistic” era. In this era, Greek immigrants spread widely across the regions of Alexander’s conquests with the support of the Macedonian dynasties who divided the territory among themselves. In Egypt, ruled from the coastal city of Alexandria by the descendants of Alexander’s general Ptolemy, many Greeks and other Aegean immigrants served as local administrators to help manage the kingdom. In the summer of 257, one of these administrators was having a bad couple of months.

Panakestor, originally from Caria in southwestern Anatolia, was the overseer of an estate near the new town of Philadelphia, in the Fayum, a large oasis in the desert west of the Nile. The owner of the estate was Apollonius, a mover and shaker in Alexandria who had many such holdings around the country.¹ Panakestor’s troubles began when Apollonius wrote to him dictating a change in how the Egyptian tenant farmers on the estate were to pay their rent. The original agreement was that, after harvest, the farmers would hand over one-third of the produce.² What Apollonius now demanded is not entirely clear (his letter to Panakestor is lost), but evidently he was not content to wait for the harvest to come in and wanted the rent paid on an up-front estimation of the crop.

Implementing the new system required a new survey of the fields. It took a few weeks for Panakestor to assemble the necessary personnel and complete the survey. He then called the farmers together and presented them with Apollonius’ orders. The farmers said they would think about it. Three days later, they had an answer: they refused to accept the new system, insisted on the original one-third rent, and threatened to abandon the harvest if {102} pressed further. They backed up their threat by walking off the fields and taking up residence in a local temple. In his correspondence with Apollonius, Panakestor described the situation:

They sat down in the temple and said they would not make an estimation, justly or unjustly, but said they would abandon the crop, for there was already an agreement that they should give you a third of the yield. Damis [another administrator] and I said many things to them, but [. . .] we accomplished nothing.



{102} Panakestor's letter to Zeno, preserved on papyrus, currently in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence.

Either Panakestor decided he had finally had enough, or else Apollonius fired him, since soon afterward, Panakestor was writing a note to his replacement, a fellow Carian named Zeno. In this letter, which survives on papyrus and provides us the details of the event, Panakestor copied a few previous letters to {103} bring Zeno up to speed on the local situation and added some helpful advice on dealing with the boss.

Panakestor's correspondence reflects some of the realities of the Mediterranean world in the centuries after Alexander. Many of the places where Greeks had once come as traders, mercenaries, and other wandering professionals were now ruled by Macedonian dynasts who privileged Greeks and Greek culture. The Greco-Macedonian elite, however, had to deal with native populations who were not always interested in Greek ways of doing things.

A small elite at the top, such as Apollonius, ruled from urban enclaves where they cultivated a self-consciously Greek culture. At the other end of the scale,

there were large native populations who mostly preferred their own traditions and ways of life. These two groups often evinced a mutual hostility: Apollonius was aggravated by the Egyptian farmers' reluctance while the farmers suspected—perhaps rightly—that they were being taken advantage of.³ Sometimes, the Greeks resorted to force, but they could hardly afford to send out the army to deal with every local labor dispute.⁴ Managing the relations between these two groups was the work of a third: administrators, merchants, and other professionals such as Panakestor. This group, even those identified as Greeks, had more ambiguous cultural associations. They could come from a variety of different backgrounds, like the Carians Panakestor and Zeno, or Paues, another professional who helped with the survey, whose name, at least, is Egyptian. They often had some degree of multilingualism, like Panakestor and Damis who evidently had no trouble communicating with the Egyptian peasants. This middle group could include elite members of the local culture, but natives could also find themselves with divided loyalties. The local Egyptian priests must have given at least tacit support to the farmers who were staging their protest in the temple. Panakestor's exasperated letters convey how difficult it could sometimes be to be caught in the middle of these cultural forces.

The promotion of Greek culture by the Macedonian kings created a new context for relations between Greeks and other peoples, one with few precedents. Long accustomed to living at the edge of powerful, prosperous kingdoms, the Greeks who followed the Macedonian dynasts now found themselves running those kingdoms. The Greeks who remained in Europe struggled against new pressures at home. In these times, even the definition of who was a Greek was open to new interpretations.

{104} Interpreting the Hellenistic Era

Alexander the Great died in Babylon in 323 BCE after several days of illness (or possibly poisoning).⁵ He left no heir capable of taking charge and no instructions as to how his empire should be governed. The struggle for power among several of his generals and followers devolved into a series of wars that lasted until 275, known as the Wars of Succession. No leader was able to hold together all of Alexander's realm, but much of the territory was eventually divided into kingdoms led by dynasties descended from commanders in Alexander's army.

The Ptolemaic dynasty ruled Egypt and some territories in the eastern Mediterranean. Antigonus the One-Eyed founded the Antigonid dynasty, which ruled Macedonia, much of Greece, some Aegean islands, and parts of the west coast of Anatolia. A third general, Seleucus, founded the Seleucid dynasty, which ruled a kingdom that initially stretched from Anatolia to modern-day Afghanistan. In the third century, eastern and western parts of the Seleucid kingdom broke away. In the east, the region of Bactria, covering parts of modern Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, became the Greco-Bactrian kingdom,

while in the west, part of Anatolia became the kingdom of Pergamon, ruled by the Attalid dynasty. These states, known as the Successor kingdoms, flourished for several centuries before succumbing to Roman and Parthian conquest.

The designation of this period as “Hellenistic” goes back to the eighteenth century. Like the terms “archaic” and “classical” applied to previous periods, it reflects the attitudes of that time.⁶ The word “Hellenistic,” first defined by the German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann, suggests that the period was Greek-like, but not really Greek. Winckelmann, like many other Europeans of his time, idolized classical Greek culture and believed that Hellenistic art, with its love of the wild, grotesque, and grandiose, was a degradation of classical purity.⁷ Most historians did not regard the period as worthy of study until Johann Gustav Droysen in the nineteenth century. Droysen described the period as one of cultural melding, when Greeks shared the accomplishments of their civilization with peoples of the East. Droysen, too, idolized classical Greece and believed that while exposure to Greek culture elevated peoples of Egypt and southwest Asia, contact with their {105} cultures debased the Greeks. All was ultimately for the good, however, since it was out of this combination of cultures that Christianity eventually emerged. The Hellenistic period, Droysen believed, held the key to reconciling classical Greece and Christianity, the two cultural ideals on which nineteenth-century claims of European superiority depended.⁸ Droysen’s ideas were useful to contemporary imperialists, both those who believed in the mission to spread European civilization and those who worried about the corrupting effects of exposure to “inferior” cultures.⁹

cultural.¹³

In the late twentieth century, however, some historians began pushing back against the view of the Hellenistic kingdoms as “apartheid” states. This trend has continued into the twenty-first century, and the scholarly consensus has shifted again to see the boundaries between ethnic and cultural groups in the Hellenistic world not as sharp lines but as gray areas where individuals, institutions, and ideas could mix. While the Successor kingdoms are still understood in terms of imperialism and colonialism, more recent scholarship has focused on the limits of Macedonian power, the flexibility of the Hellenistic states, and the continuation of native cultures.¹⁴

{107} Historians always tend to see the past as reflecting the concerns of their present. Few periods of ancient history, though, have seen as dramatic shifts in scholarly attitudes as the Hellenistic. There are reasons for this volatility. The Successor kingdoms were volatile themselves. They were products of civil war and subject to routine struggles both among themselves and against internal disintegration. The Macedonian dynasts drew heavily on Greek culture and expertise in governing their kingdoms, but while Greeks had built up extensive practical experience managing city-states, they had far less preparation for ruling large, multi-ethnic kingdoms. Experimentation and compromise were necessary parts of Hellenistic rule.

It was also in this age that Greeks and their culture came into contact with the widest range of other cultures. Greeks and Macedonians settled in new cities as far east as the Indus valley, while in the western Mediterranean old Greek colonies such as Syracuse and Massilia reached new heights of influence and prosperity. Other Mediterranean powers, such as Carthage and Rome, employed Greek culture to engage with a larger international world. The processes by which Greek culture had been reinvented through trade and colonization in earlier periods were accelerated and elaborated. People who did not identify as Greeks increasingly adopted Greek elements as material for their own cultural productions. While the North African Terence, in the early second century BCE, was writing comedies based on Greek originals for the Roman theater, a parody version of Euripides’ drama *Iphigenia in Tauris* was written in Egypt which transferred the action to the coast of India and incorporated dialogue in a western Indian language.¹⁵ The wide scope of these interactions magnified the range of possible responses.

The Hellenistic era also presents us with an unprecedented depth of documentation. Greeks had their deepest interaction with some of the other great literary cultures of the ancient Mediterranean and beyond, including those of Rome, Egypt, Judaea, Syria, and Mesopotamia. To a greater degree than before, we are able to examine the details of cross-cultural encounters from both sides. The weight of this literary production can be felt especially in Egypt, where the desert climate has preserved papyrus documents, including the sorts of ephemeral, everyday texts rarely preserved elsewhere. The complexities of the Hellenistic world become visible to us in texts that range from royal decrees to

personal letters, tax receipts to dream journals.

Given the instability of the Successor kingdoms, the wide range of cultural contacts they encouraged, and the wealth of surviving documentation, the Hellenistic age is open to many interpretations. Understanding the Hellenistic experience requires examining the period from many different angles, political and cultural, Greek and non-Greek alike.

{108} Resistance, Collaboration, and Compromise

The politics of the Hellenistic kingdoms were defined by the rule of Macedonian dynasties over peoples who were mostly not Macedonian and whose political traditions were in many cases older and more sophisticated. The Greek cities of the Aegean were restless under Macedonian rule, while in Asia and Egypt, native populations had varying responses to foreign domination. The Successor dynasties and their supporters were minorities in the territories they ruled. Some peoples were able to mount armed rebellions and establish their own local governments, but not all resistance was violent or aimed at the overthrow of royal power. Often resistance meant the preservation of indigenous ways of life and the withholding of labor, support, and acknowledgment from royal initiatives. The success of the kingdoms depended on some amount of native collaboration.¹⁶

The Antigonids in Macedonia kept hold of most of the Greek cities for more than a century, but not without difficulty. Several mainland cities rebelled against Macedonian control in the aftermath of Alexander's death, and resistance to Macedonian rule was a focus of politics in Hellenistic Greece. Some Macedonian factions tried to gain Greek support by promising freedom for the Greek cities.¹⁷ When the Romans began to involve themselves in Greek affairs in the late third century BCE, they similarly promoted themselves as champions of Greek freedom.¹⁸ The Antigonids and their supporters tried to revive the spirit of the League of Corinth, the nominal alliance by which Philip II had disguised his domination of Greece, and present themselves as exemplars of Greek values.¹⁹

The sprawling Seleucid kingdom maintained control over its core Syrian and Mesopotamian territories for several centuries, but it had frontier problems in the east and west. In the west, it faced pressures from Antigonid Macedonia and Ptolemaic Egypt and lost some territory to breakaway kingdoms under native rulers or former Persian satraps in Anatolia.²⁰ In the east, early conflicts with the Mauryan Empire in India were settled when Seleucus reached a diplomatic understanding with the founding Mauryan king, Chandragupta Maurya.²¹ Bactria and Parthia, in the northeast, later broke off as independent kingdoms.

The greatest internal resistance to Seleucid rule came from the Jews. Judaea was contested ground in the Wars of Succession and in later conflicts between {109} the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. Though Judaea ended up under Seleucid rule, it had strong economic and cultural ties to Egypt, where there was a large Jewish population in Alexandria. The early Seleucid kings, dependent on local

good will for the stability of their southwestern frontier, allowed the Jews a favorable status and guaranteed the protection of their traditions and institutions.²² By the early second century, however, relations between the Jews and Seleucids had deteriorated as ongoing conflicts between Jewish factions threatened to destabilize the region. The Seleucid king Antiochus IV attempted to assert control by throwing his support behind one faction. In 167 he ordered an attack on Jerusalem, where the opposing faction was ascendant, and the suppression of traditional religious practices within Judaea. The harshness of these measures spurred the Maccabean Revolt, which gathered support in the countryside and exhausted the Seleucid armies with guerrilla fighting in the wilderness. In 160 a political solution was reached that allowed the Jews to exercise some local autonomy and protect their religious customs while still owing fealty to the Seleucid kings. Ties to the Seleucids were gradually weakened until in 123 BCE Judaea became fully independent.²³

In Ptolemaic Egypt, resistance was centered on Thebes, an ancient seat of Egyptian royal power. In 205 an Egyptian named Horwennefer led a revolt that expelled Ptolemaic power from much of southern Egypt for the next two decades. Only in 185 did Ptolemy V succeed in reconquering the region. Thebes revolted again in 132 and 91. After this last revolt the Ptolemies demolished the city. As in Judaea, many of these disturbances appear to have had their roots in local factional conflicts, but they were quickly recast in nationalist terms by the rebels.²⁴

Most of the resistance that the Hellenistic kingdoms faced, however, was less violent and more like the labor action by Apollonius' Egyptian tenant farmers. The peasant masses could express their feelings about the regimes through overt acts like the farmers' strike and subtler, more pervasive forms of noncompliance.²⁵ The Hellenistic kings found that managing their kingdoms required collaboration from native elites. It was not that peasants were any happier being exploited by their own people than by foreign conquerors. Rather, native elites with local knowledge and cultural authority were more effective at negotiating workable compromises. At the same time, co-opting members of the local aristocracy for the Macedonian regimes kept vital {110} resources and military experience away from the more organized resistance movements.

The Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties adopted the Persian model of limited incorporation. In Egypt, the administration of the country had long depended on local priests. The Ptolemies backed the continued local importance of temple institutions in exchange for the priests' support.²⁶ The Seleucid kings appointed native aristocrats to many lower-level administrative posts and allowed a few to ascend into the royal court.²⁷ Making this collaboration work required accommodations on both sides. Native leaders who wanted to advance under the new regimes had to acquire both fluency in the Greek language and some expertise in Greek culture. Many adopted Greek names, such as the Babylonian governor of Uruk, Anu-Uballit, who took the Greek name Cephalus, married a Greek wife, and gave Greek names to his children.²⁸ The kings took on some of

the traditional responsibilities of local rulers, such as building temples, supporting state cults, and patronizing traditional institutions and celebrations. The later Ptolemaic kings were accordingly crowned at the old capital city Memphis in Pharaonic style, and Seleucid kings participated in the Babylonian New Year's festival.²⁹

The Ptolemaic and Seleucid kings made public gestures toward multiculturalism in their realms. Although Greek was privileged as the language of administration, both dynasties also used the local languages for formal proclamations. The Seleucid kings took on key identifiers associated with Babylonian kingship, as reflected in a dedicatory inscription written in Akkadian cuneiform in which Antiochus I combined the assertion of his Macedonian ancestry with Babylonian royal titles and responsibilities for temple maintenance: "Antiochus, great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Babylon, king of the lands, provider for Esagil and Ezida [the main temples of Babylon], foremost heir of Seleucus, the king, the Macedonian, king of Babylon. . . ."³⁰ The Ptolemies adopted Osarapis, a version of the Egyptian sacred Apis bull identified with the god Osiris, who was favored by Greek immigrants in Memphis. Under the name Sarapis, this god was reimagined {111} with a combination of Greek and Egyptian attributes, and his worship was encouraged as part of the state cult.³¹

Despite these gestures of inclusiveness, the culture of the Successor courts remained primarily Greek, but Greekness was not a fixed quality that could be simply copied from the classical poleis. Although many Greeks immigrated in search of new opportunities, they, like other migrant populations in history, found their culture changed by the experience. The compromises that the Successor dynasties made to secure their power had consequences for the cultures of not just Egypt and southwestern Asia but Greece as well.

Being Greek in the Hellenistic World

In the Hellenistic age, the capacity of Greek culture to be reimagined in new places for new audiences remained one of its most important features. At the same time, Greek culture became attached to a privileged elite and was used as a tool of power. Many people who lived under the rule of the Successor kings adopted some features of Greek culture, a process we refer to as "Hellenization." What it meant to be Greek, however, could vary widely from one context to another.

The Seleucid and Ptolemaic kings needed loyal followers to help pacify the unruly parts of their kingdoms and educated administrators to fill their chronically understaffed bureaucracies. To meet these needs, they encouraged the immigration of Greeks, in addition to some recruitment of cooperative native aristocrats. Among themselves, the dynasties and their close supporters maintained a distinct sense of Macedonian identity, but the ruling class as a

whole adopted Greekness as its unifying principle.³²

To help secure their western and eastern regions, the Seleucid kings founded numerous new cities in Syria and Iran. These cities were based on the Greek model, influenced by earlier colonial experiences, with religious establishments, cultural trappings, and institutions of local self-governance that would have been familiar to anyone from the Aegean. These cities enjoyed a favored status and drew immigrants from Greece and nearby regions, such as Caria and Thrace. The interactions of settlers from so many different origins tended to erase regional traditions, and the culture that emerged in these cities was more uniform and cosmopolitan than the polis-centered culture of Greece. Gods such as Dionysus and Aphrodite, who lacked strong regional attachments, were particularly favored, and traditionally Panhellenic institutions {112} like the oracle at Delphi and intercommunal athletic competitions were celebrated.³³ The melding of many different dialects of Greek resulted in a new dialect known as *Koinē* (meaning “common” or “shared”), which was based on the dialect of Athens but incorporated features of other dialects and smoothed out many of the irregularities of Greek grammar.

In Egypt, Greekness was a matter of individual rather than communal identity. The Ptolemies, like the Seleucids, recruited immigrants to fill the royal bureaucracy and army. All these immigrants, regardless of their origin, were designated “Greeks,” an administrative rather than ethnic category, which conferred legal and economic advantages. Members of the Egyptian elite who served the Ptolemies were also counted as Greeks.³⁴ Alexandria was built up with religious and cultural institutions that celebrated Greekness, such as the famous Library in which the great works of Greek literature were collected and studied. Naukratis, the old colony, remained a Greek community, and the Ptolemies founded one new city in southern Egypt, Ptolemais, as a regional capital on the same Greek model as the Seleucid cities. Most of the “Greek” class not directly attached to the court in Alexandria, though, lived and worked in predominantly Egyptian communities. Like Panakestor, their day-to-day dealings were largely with those who were not counted among the Greeks.

Within the first few generations of the Hellenistic period, the division between Greek and non-Greek became more complicated than these political projects imagined. Various aspects of Greek identity—language, names, ways of life, religious practices, claims of ancestry, social and cultural institutions—increasingly became separate elements that could be asserted or rejected by individuals and communities alike. As an abstracted version of Greekness became solidified as the mark of international power and prestige, some non-Greek communities began to adopt features of the Greek polis as a means of asserting their status in the new system. At the same time, Greek and other Aegean immigrants who lived surrounded by peoples of other cultures tended to take on local practices for themselves.

The old Persian satrapal capital Sardis, in Lydia, had long had close ties to Greece, but in the Hellenistic age its people reorganized the city on the Greek

polis model, complete with local government, a theater, a chariot-racing course, and a gymnasium (a place for socializing and education, in addition to athletic practice).³⁵ In other places, Greek elements were selectively mixed with features from other cultures. The Seleucid city at Ai Khanoum in Bactria {113} had a Greek-style gymnasium and theater, but also a temple of Mesopotamian type and a palace that was built in traditional Persian style but adorned with Greek Corinthian columns.³⁶ On Falaika, an island in the Persian Gulf, a garrison of Seleucid soldiers had Greek-style temples and athletic games, but the material culture of their daily lives was largely Mesopotamian.³⁷ By contrast, at Uruk, one of the largest cities of Mesopotamia, there is no evidence for the introduction of Greek architecture or cultural institutions, but pottery in Greek style was locally produced and used both as ordinary tableware and for religious purposes.³⁸

Substantial numbers of immigrants from other regions are also attested in Greece in the Hellenistic age. When the Macedonian king Demetrius I founded a new city in Thessaly in the early third century, it drew settlers not just from Greece but also Phoenicia, Bithynia (part of northern Anatolia), Thrace, Illyria, and Egypt.³⁹ Significant populations of Jews migrated to the Aegean, as well as to places such as Alexandria, Antioch, and Cyrene.⁴⁰ The island cities of Rhodes and Delos show the influence of immigrants from Anatolia, Phoenicia, and southern Italy who built their own places of worship and left multilingual inscriptions recording their prayers and accomplishments.⁴¹ Rhodes and Delos were also major centers of the slave trade, and the people who passed unwillingly through their harbors came from an area that reached west to Gaul, north to the Black Sea steppes, east to Persia, and south to Egypt.⁴² At the other end of the social scale, Greece also attracted immigrants of wealth and prestige, such as the Carthaginian philosopher Hasdrubal, who adopted the Greek name Clitomachus and became head of Plato's Academy in Athens in 129 BCE.⁴³

Despite (or, indeed, because of) this influx of immigrants and the pressures of Macedonian rule, identification with the polis remained a vital part of Greeks' sense of themselves. The history of individual cities became a {114} major theme of historical writing as Greeks struggled to define their place under the Macedonian dynasts.⁴⁴ As in the fourth century, attitudes toward the Macedonians depended on political inclinations, but even Greeks who supported Macedonian rule tended to see Macedonians as outsiders. The historian Polybius records a debate between pro- and anti-Macedonian Greeks. While the anti-Macedonian speaker emphasized the brutality of the Macedonians in their dealings with Greeks, and the pro-Macedonian speaker instead stressed Macedonian successes against the Persians and other barbarians, both sides regarded Greeks and Macedonians as distinct peoples.⁴⁵ For their part, the Antigonid kings continued to draw on Greeks as well as Thracians and some others to staff their administration, but many showed a preference for ethnic Macedonians.⁴⁶

Even at the individual and family level, identities could become complex. Large-scale immigration and the incorporation of native elites into the ruling

classes under the Successor kings built on existing traditions of intermarriage and cultural assimilation to produce many families with mixed cultural connections. Members of these families often used both Greek and native names, depending on the context.⁴⁷ One such family's grave markers at Edfu in Egypt include, for the same people, both Greek-style inscriptions with Greek names and Egyptian-style memorials with Egyptian names.⁴⁸ This multiplicity of identities is reflected in private matters as well. In a personal letter preserved on papyrus in Egypt, one Ptolemaeus described a dream to his friend Achilles. Ptolemaeus began the letter in Greek, but noted that he had written the account of the dream "in Egyptian so that you will know it precisely." Since the two men could read and write Greek, perhaps the change of language indicates that Ptolemaeus had dreamt in Egyptian.⁴⁹ Another dreamer named Apollonius (not to be confused with Panakestor's boss) also {115} recorded his dreams in Egyptian, but he signed his name with an emphatic self-identification: "Apollonius the Macedonian . . . a Macedonian I say."⁵⁰

Even after the Hellenistic states had collapsed or been conquered by other powers, people across the Mediterranean and southwest Asia continued to experience Greekness in a multiplicity of ways.⁵¹ In India, in the last centuries BCE and first centuries CE, descendants of Greek settlers who had adopted local names made offerings in temples to Indian gods, but they still identified themselves in the local language as *Yavana*, or Greek, relying only on their descent to maintain this identity.⁵² The philosopher Favorinus, in the Roman period, reversed those terms, arguing that he was a Greek despite his Gaulish ancestry because he had embraced Greek habits, language, and philosophy.⁵³

The Hellenistic kingdoms were not melting pots. The encounters of people from many different backgrounds led not to a blended culture but to a range of possibilities. While the upper crust remained insistently Greco-Macedonian and the majority of peasant farmers and laborers probably had little contact with or interest in Greek culture, there were people who negotiated multiple identities, selectively combined cultural traditions, or created new ways of expressing their own cultures.

Crossing Cultures

The Successor kingdoms made elements of Greek culture available to many people who used them for their own purposes. They also brought Greeks into contact with outside cultures in novel ways. At the same time, as trade and migration continued to bring people, goods, and ideas together, the new cities, alliances, and power structures of the Hellenistic period provided a new landscape for these encounters to play out in.

Greek became the language of authority. The Jewish community in Alexandria, among others, perceived the value of being able to present itself in Greek terms. Its most famous literary product was the Septuagint, a translation of

biblical texts into Greek. A fictionalized account of the translation project is given by another Greek text, the *Letter of Aristeas*. As the *Letter* tells the story, the work was commissioned for the Library. Before the work began, Ptolemy II quizzed each of the scholars involved on philosophical matters and, impressed by their responses, remarked on how well Jewish teaching {116} accorded with Greek virtues of self-control, piety, and justice.⁵⁴ The *Letter* makes explicit what was implied by the Septuagint: that the Jews deserved a place of respect in a political context that prized Greek thought.⁵⁵ Others adopted not only the Greek language but also Greek literary genres. Manetho, an Egyptian priest, and Berossus, a Babylonian priest and astronomer, both wrote histories of their own peoples to convey their historical traditions to a Greek audience.⁵⁶

For more practical purposes, Koinē Greek also became the predominant language of trade and diplomacy in and around the Hellenistic states. The Indian king Ashoka, in the mid-third century BCE, had edicts advocating Buddhist principles displayed on pillars and rocks in Greek and Aramaic in western parts of his kingdom where his subjects included Greek immigrants as well as those still accustomed to the Persians' use of Aramaic.⁵⁷ In the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, contracts for the hire of Scythian mercenaries were drawn up in Greek.⁵⁸ At the southern edge of the Hellenistic world, ambassadors from the Nubian kingdom of Kush used Greek to communicate with the Ptolemies.⁵⁹

Peoples of the Hellenistic world also adopted other elements of Greek culture in order to assert their right to a place in the Macedonian-ruled kingdoms. Several Jewish sources from the period of contention with the Seleucids make claims to a connection with the Greeks. One source reports that sons of Abraham accompanied the Greek hero Heracles on his journeys.⁶⁰ Another records a purported exchange of letters between Jewish and Spartan leaders acknowledging a common ancestry.⁶¹ Both of these stories anchored the Jews in a Greek context, much as the Macedonian king Alexander I had once used his supposed descent from Heracles to anchor himself among the Greeks. By connecting themselves with Heracles, the Macedonian kings' mythic ancestor, as well as the Spartans, inveterate foes of Macedonia, the Jews asserted their right to an equal and independent standing among the Successor kingdoms. The narrative of Jewish resistance against the Seleucids in 2 Maccabees overtly asserts the superiority of Jewish culture over Greek, but it also applies {117} a distinctively Greek vocabulary of heroism to Jewish ideals of religious piety and perseverance in adversity.⁶² Even those who most adamantly rejected Greek culture were still fluent in its ideas.

Egyptian literature laid claim to Alexander in the same way as the Persian oral traditions that recast the Macedonian king as heir to the Achaemenid line (Chapter 5). A popular tale claimed that the last native Egyptian king, Nectanebo II, had traveled to Macedonia and seduced Queen Olympias, Alexander's mother, by magic and disguise, and was therefore Alexander's true father.⁶³ More playfully, a Syrian poet who wrote in Greek with the Greek name Meleager tweaked cultural pretensions by arguing that Homer must have been a

Syrian because his heroes never ate fish, a taboo among Syrians.⁶⁴ Not all responses to Greek culture were antagonistic. Egyptian popular literature also reflects the adoption of Greek themes and characters as storytelling material, such as the tale of *Egyptians and Amazons*, which rewrote Greek legends about the hero Achilles and the Amazon queen Penthesileia in an Egyptian setting with Egyptian characters.⁶⁵ Literary influence could also flow the other direction. The story that makes Nectanebo the father of Alexander is best known to us from the *Alexander Romance*, a fictionalized account of Alexander's life, which shows that the tale had been accepted into the Greco-Macedonian tradition as well.⁶⁶

Some influences of Greek culture reached far beyond the boundaries of the Hellenistic kingdoms. Elements of classical Greek art were incorporated into Indian art, particularly the Greco-Buddhist art of northern India. Among these was the depiction of Heracles, a muscular hero who typically appears bare-chested wielding a club. In Indian art, his image became one of the common ways of depicting Vajrapāṇi, the guardian of the Buddha. This iconography traveled with Buddhism to China and eventually Japan, where it shaped the depiction of the Niō, a pair of muscular, bare-chested, club-wielding guardian statues traditionally placed before Japanese Buddhist temples.⁶⁷

Greek culture was not the only culture that traveled. In addition to erecting inscriptions, King Ashoka also sent Buddhist missionaries into Seleucid territory.⁶⁸ In the mid-second century, the Greek king of Bactria, Menander, {119} converted to Buddhism. A text purporting to record the conversations between Menander and the sage Nāgasena that led to the king's conversion is preserved as part of the Buddhist canon in East Asia.⁶⁹ By the late Hellenistic period there were Buddhist communities in Mesopotamia and northern Arabia.⁷⁰ Influences of Buddhist and Hindu thought are visible in Hellenistic Greek philosophy, Judaism, and, generations later, early Christianity.⁷¹



{118} Greek bronze statue of Heracles (copy of an earlier statue by Lysippos, fourth century BCE, now lost), currently in the Louvre Museum, Paris. The hero is recognizable from his typical attributes: muscular body, untamed hair, club, and lion skin.



Relief sculpture of the Buddha (left) and his guardian Vajrapāṇi (right), from Gandhara (part of modern-day Pakistan and Afghanistan) in the first century BCE (currently in the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin). Vajrapāṇi has Heracles' wild hair and muscular body. He carries a double-headed club, and the rough fringe of his draped garment may suggest a lion's fur.



Japanese Niō statue from the eighth century CE, made of colored clay, at the Todaiji Temple, Nara, Japan. The figure's wavyhair and muscular arms and legs resemble Heracles, and, though the lion skin has disappeared, he carries the club.

The Egyptian deities Isis and Sarapis were adopted elsewhere. Egyptian émigrés often led the worship of these gods, but local people throughout the Mediterranean were included among their worshipers. Dedications to these and other Egyptian gods are found in settlements as distant as the shores of the Black Sea and northern Iran.⁷² The worship of foreign gods such as Isis and the Thracian Bendis was already well established in Athens by the Hellenistic period, but the Athenians welcomed new cults as they provided new opportunities for the rich to display their generosity through public benefactions.⁷³ Many inscriptions in honor of Isis erected in these new places of worship identified the goddess in terms of local mythic traditions. Isis' growing international status is visible even in Egypt in a first-century hymn inscribed on the gateposts of an older Egyptian temple in the Fayum. This hymn, composed in Greek but demonstrating a knowledge of Egyptian myth, addresses the goddess directly:

The Syrians call you Astarte, Artemis, and Nanaia,
 the people of Lycia address you as Queen Leto,
 men of Thrace call you the mother of the gods,
 and the Greeks name you great-throned Hera, sweet Aphrodite,
 good Hestia, Rhea, and Demeter,

but the Egyptians call you The Only One, for you are the one who is all other goddesses named by humanity.⁷⁴

These examples represent the broad range of cultural adaptations that happened in the Hellenistic world. While some Greeks were policing the lines between themselves and foreigners, others were setting up sanctuaries for {120} Egyptian gods. Some people adopted Greek culture to assert their place in the Successor kingdoms while others proclaimed their own cultures' superiority.

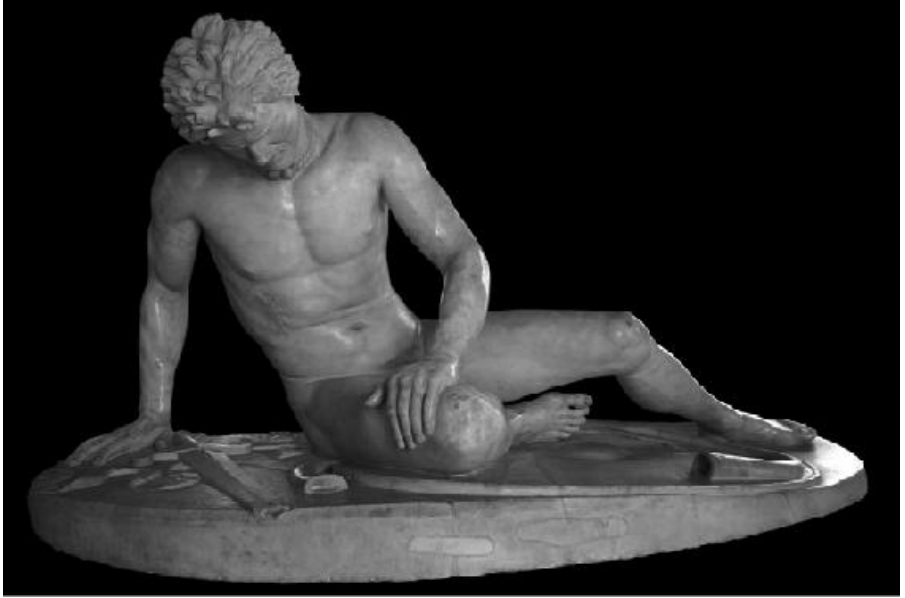
The New Barbarians

Like the Persian Empire they had replaced, the Macedonian kingdoms had to manage relations with many different cultures on their frontiers. Some of these relations were amicable. After their early conflicts, matters between the Seleucids and the Mauryan kings in India remained relatively stable. The Ptolemies reached a similar level of stability with Kush to their south. Three new peoples entered the Hellenistic world, however, who caused more serious problems for the Successor states.

One dramatic threat came from mobile bands of warriors from Europe. Greeks identified these peoples as "Gauls" or "Galatians," but it is not clear that they had any collective sense of ethnic identity or would have agreed with Greek descriptions of themselves (Chapter 7). These warrior bands had taken control of the lower Danube valley in the early fourth century. In the third century, the pressure of Roman expansion in the west sent new migrants into the Danube region, and local chiefs found themselves facing greater competition for the resources they needed to secure the loyalty of their warrior followers. Those who lost out in the local competition began looking for new opportunities farther afield. Some joined up as mercenaries with the Hellenistic kings. Others turned to raiding the cities and trade routes of the Aegean. In 279 a coalition of warbands began moving toward Greece. Greek authors described this movement as if it were an organized army with a chain of command, but in reality it was probably a loose alliance of separate bands with their own leaders and agendas.

Some of these warriors made an attempt to raid Delphi, but they were repelled.⁷⁵ Another group, perhaps absorbing survivors from the Delphi raid, settled in Thrace. Others kept moving, crossed into Anatolia, and raided extensively before settling in a region of the interior where they set themselves up as a ruling class collecting tribute from the inhabitants.⁷⁶ Those who settled in Anatolia, typically referred to as "Galatians," continued to raid neighboring regions and provide mercenaries for the Hellenistic kingdoms until the 230s, when the Attalid kingdom dealt them a serious defeat. The victory over the Galatians became one of the central motifs of Attalid propaganda, in which it was equated with the Olympian gods' victory over the chaotic Titans of myth. In a similar vein, the repulse of the Delphi raid became a celebrated {121} incident in Greek history, often magnified to mythic proportions with Apollo himself

striking down the attackers.



{121} The Dying Gaul, a Roman marble copy of a third-century BCE Greek bronze original from Pergamon. The original was displayed as part of the Attalid king's victory monument celebrating the triumph over the Galatians. Currently in the Capitoline Museums, Rome.

At the eastern edge of the Seleucid kingdom, another people began to make their presence felt in the third century. The Parni, an Iranian-speaking, seminomadic people from central Asia, began to migrate into the Seleucid satrapy of Parthia. For a few generations, their immigration was gradual and peaceful. In 239 the Greco-Bactrian kingdom broke away from the Seleucid state. Around the same time, the Seleucid satrap of Parthia attempted to make a similar break and establish an independent kingdom, but the Parni quickly took control of the region under their king, Arsaces. This new kingdom adopted the name of the region in which it had been planted and became known to the world as the Parthian Empire.⁷⁷

The Seleucids launched unsuccessful campaigns to reconquer Parthia and eventually reached a settlement recognizing the Parthian kings and their territorial claims. These claims remained modest at first, but in the mid-second century the Parthians began a campaign of conquest that quickly won them control of Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau. To legitimize their rule of this territory, the Parthians identified themselves with the culture of the previous ruling powers, the Achaemenid Persians and the Hellenistic Greeks. The {122} Parthian appeal to these precedents can be seen as early as the coins issued by Arsaces, which depict a seated man in loose-fitting clothes with a bow, mirroring the royal portraiture of the Achaemenid kings, but also displaying text in Greek. Several of his successors incorporated the word *Philhellenos*, “friend of the Greeks,” into their royal titles, while at the same time adopting many



{122} A coin of the Parthian king Arsaces, late third century BCE. The king is shown seated on a throne holding a bow, in Achaemenid style, surrounded by Greek text that reads: "ARSAKOU AUTOKRATOROS" ("[An image] of Arsaces, the ruler").

The Gauls and the Parthians both presented new challenges to Hellenistic ideas about Greeks and barbarians. The Greeks' sense of their place in the world had long been shaped by their interactions with larger, richer, more stable states such as Egypt and Persia. Whether those interactions were friendly, like the long-standing trade relationship with Egypt, or hostile, like the wars against Persia, Greeks were accustomed to thinking of themselves as poor, rugged, and independent. With the Macedonian conquests followed only a few generations later by the Gaulish raids, this image was upset. The riches and royal bureaucracies of Persia and Egypt were now in the hands of people who identified as Greeks, and they were threatened by the wanderings of poor, rugged, independent Gauls. The Hellenistic reaction to Gaulish raiding may reflect not just the shock of foreign invasion but an attempt to avoid unflattering comparisons by transposing the events of history into the register of myth.

The Parthians challenged the principles of Hellenistic society not by rejecting them but by mastering them. The Seleucid kings, like their fellow Successors, had built their power on military prowess and the assertion that they, as representatives of Greek culture, were supremely suited to rule over barbarians. The Parthians' military success undermined one of these claims, while their successful incorporation of Persian and Greek traditions into their ruling ideology gave the lie to the other.

But of all the new peoples to intrude on the Hellenistic world, those who had the most far-reaching effects and the most complicated relationship with Greek culture were the Romans. When Alexander was campaigning in Persia, Rome was still building its hegemony in the Italian peninsula. A century later, Rome was a growing Mediterranean power whose influence was increasingly felt in the eastern Mediterranean. Like the Gauls and the Parthians, the Romans did not fit into the

Hellenistic model. They were outsiders who embraced some aspects of Greek culture but rejected others. They ruled a {123} multi-ethnic empire, but on different terms than the Hellenistic kings ruled theirs. They presented themselves as champions of the old Greek cities against Antigonid Macedonian interference and struck up a warm alliance with the Attalids, but they also allied with the Jews against the Seleucid kings. Their relations with the Ptolemies varied depending on their diplomatic needs elsewhere.

The Hellenistic world, for all its complications, was fundamentally shaped by the joining of Greek culture to political power. The Greeks of the old city-states who resisted Macedonian rule and the new “Greek” administrative class who turned the wheels of Seleucid and Ptolemaic government all lived under the shadow of the Hellenistic hegemonies. So did the peoples of southwest Asia and Egypt, whether they sought advancement under the new regimes, resisted them, or just tried to get on with their lives.

1. The details come from *Papiri della Società Italiana* V 502. On this and related texts, see Mikhail Rostovtzeff, *A Large Estate in Egypt in the Third Century B.C.: A Study in Economic History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1922); Elizabeth Grier, *Accounting in the Zenon Papyri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934); Jean Bingen, *Hellenistic Egypt: Monarchy, Society, Economy, Culture*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 229–39.

2. This was a rather generous arrangement for the Egyptians, who might normally have to pay half their crop, but it was typical for land that had only recently been brought under cultivation and required more labor. Bingen, *Hellenistic Egypt*, 234.

3. Claire Préaux, *Les Grecs en Égypte d'après les archives de Zénon* (Brussels: J. Lebègue, 1947), 63–64.

4. Note, however, the substantial rural police force in Ptolemaic Egypt documented by Willy Clarysse and Dorothy J. Thompson, *Counting the People in Hellenistic Egypt*, vol. 2, *Historical Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

5. Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 17.117; Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Alexander” 75.1; Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.26–27; Justinus, *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus’ Philippic Histories* 12.13.

6. For a summary of the historiography, see Ian S. Moyer, *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11–36.

7. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (Dresden, 1764); Harriet Batten-Foster, “Noble Simplicity and Sedate Grandeur: The Distillation of the Classical in European Taste and Its Consequences for Baroque and Hellenistic Art” (PhD diss., University of Bristol, 2013).

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9. George Grote, *A History of Greece*, vol. 12 (London, 1846–56) 355–56; John P. Mahaffy, *Greek Life and Thought 323–146 B.C. from the Age of Alexander to the Roman Conquest* (London: Macmillan, 1887), 575–76.

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11. Harold Idris Bell, “Hellenic Culture in Egypt,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 8, nos. 3/4 (October 1922): 139–55; William Woodthorpe Tarn and Guy Thomson Griffith, *Hellenistic*

Civilization (London: E. Arnold, 1952), 5; Paul M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 81–82.

12. Claire Préaux, *L'économie royale des Lagides* (Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1939); Bingen, *Hellenistic Egypt*, 240–55. See Csaba A. La'da, "Encounters with Ancient Egypt: The Hellenistic Greek Experience," in *Ancient Perspectives on Egypt*, ed. Roger J. Matthews and Cornelia Roemer (London: Institute of Archaeology, University College, 2003), 157–69.

13. Samuel K. Eddy, *The King Is Dead: Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism, 334–31 B.C.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961); Edouard Will, "Pour une 'anthropologie coloniale' du monde hellénistique," in *The Craft of the Ancient Historian: Essays in Honor of Chester G. Starr*, ed. John W. Eadie and Josiah Ober (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 273–301.

14. Willy Clarysse, "Greeks and Egyptians in the Ptolemaic Army and Administration," *Aegyptus* 65 (1985): 57–66; Dorothy J. Thompson, *Memphis under the Ptolemies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Susan M. Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Joseph G. Manning, *The Last Pharaohs: Egypt under the Ptolemies, 305–30 BC* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Moyer, *Egypt*; Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 278–320.

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18. Polybius, *Roman History* 18.44–46.

19. Asirvatham, "Perspectives," 104–5.

20. Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 283–84.

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25. Bingen, *Hellenistic Egypt*, 189–205. Although focused on the Roman era, Richard Horsley offers useful remarks on the Seleucid experience in Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

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{125} CHAPTER 7

ROME AND ITALY

The year 205 BCE was a disastrous one for the Roman Republic. The Second Punic War between Rome and Carthage was dragging on into its second decade, and the Carthaginian army under Hannibal had been at large in Italy for thirteen long years. Famine had struck Rome, and disease threatened to kill the troops in the field. Meteor showers scattered stones from the sky, an omen of doom.

In such dark times the Romans relied on the guidance of the Sibylline Books, an ancient collection of oracular predictions, recorded in Greek verse and kept by a board of ten priests. These priests reported that the Books prescribed a remedy for Rome's ills: the great goddess Cybele must be brought from her home in Phrygia and worshiped in Rome.

Cybele was a mother goddess who had long been venerated in the mountains of Anatolia, represented by a black stone kept at Pessinus, part of the Attalid kingdom of Pergamon. Emissaries were sent to ask for permission to transfer the stone and Cybele's cult to Italy. First, however, the emissaries visited the oracle at Delphi to seek the approval of Apollo. With the god's blessing and the Attalid king's consent, they brought the goddess's stone to Rome, where it was placed in the temple of Victory.

Yet there were some aspects of Cybele's cult that were not welcome in Rome. In her homeland, she was celebrated with ecstatic rites by priests who had castrated themselves. Cybele's priests were imported to Rome along with her stone and allowed to continue their rituals, but they were not allowed to become Roman citizens or to leave the goddess's temple precinct except on a few holy days each year, nor was any Roman allowed to join them. The Romans instead created their own ways of celebrating Cybele that had little to do with her native traditions.¹

The transfer of Cybele had more than religious implications. The year 205 was also important for Rome's relations with the Hellenistic kingdoms. Hannibal had made an alliance with King Philip V of Macedonia, and the Romans had been fighting a second war in Greece while holding out against Hannibal in Italy. King Attalus of Pergamon had been a valuable ally in the war against Philip, but the war ended with a negotiated peace in 205 that {126} left Macedonia in a strong position and Pergamon surrounded by hostile forces.² In seeking Cybele from Pergamon, the Romans were confirming that their alliance with Attalus remained

intact. By having the transfer of the goddess approved by the oracle at Delphi, they were proclaiming this message in terms that all the states of the Greek world understood. At the same time, the Roman response to the priests of Cybele and their wild rituals drew a line between what was acceptable at Rome and what was not. Many peoples and their traditions could be incorporated into the Roman state, but some were kept at a distance.³

The bringing of Cybele to Rome is characteristic of how the Romans interacted with other peoples. Roman culture was outward-looking and expansive, but it was also conscious of how it related to and was perceived by others. Rome's engagement with foreign peoples was driven by political needs and calculated to serve the purposes of an imperialistic state. Often this engagement involved an openness to foreign peoples and ideas, but sometimes it meant reinforcing the boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Both ways of dealing with foreign peoples were important in the rise of Rome from a city-state to a Mediterranean empire.

The Emergence of Rome

Rome was one of several cities to emerge in the eighth century BCE in Latium, a region of coastal plains and hills on the western side of central Italy. Rome was built at the site of the lowest ford on the Tiber River. The Tiber was navigable by boat from the Mediterranean coast to the foothills of the Apennine Mountains, and the ford near Rome was a crossing point for an ancient trade route between northern and southern Italy.⁴ The city was created as several originally separate hilltop villages expanded and coalesced into one settlement.

Rome was a Latin city and shared a common history, language, and religious tradition with the other cities of Latium. A set of legal rights bound the Latins together. These included *commercium*, which secured rights of property and contract across communal borders; *conubium*, the right to contract a valid marriage with any other Latin; and *migratio*, the right to acquire citizenship in another Latin city simply by settling there. The existence of these rights suggests that movement of individuals and families between Latin cities {127} was routine, at least at the levels of society where property and marriage laws were important concerns.⁵

Much of what we know about the early history of Rome depends on legends passed down through oral tradition and recorded by later Romans. Like all mythic sources, these legends reflect not only the concerns of the people who first told them but also the values of those who later recorded them.

Romans credited the founding of their city to the twin brothers Romulus and Remus. The two quarreled over which of them should be king of the new city. Each took position on one of the hills and watched the sky for portents. Remus spotted six vultures, but then Romulus saw twelve. Unable to settle whether seeing the *first* birds or the *most* birds was the greater sign, the brothers came to

blows. Remus was killed, leaving Romulus to rule. A different version of Remus' death has either Romulus or one of his followers slay him in anger after Remus leapt over Romulus' newly built city walls in mockery of the work.⁶ While it is unlikely that the characters or events of these legends have any historical substance, the tensions they represent—competition for primacy in the new community, factional violence, conflicts over defining the boundaries of the city—are reflections of what the early inhabitants of Rome must have experienced.⁷

The new city was governed by kings. Seven are named in the legends, some of whom may be mythical or heavily mythologized.⁸ The kingship did not pass from father to son; instead, kings were elected by the people, and many of them were not Latins. Romulus, the first king, was a Latin, but for five years he ruled jointly with the Sabine king Titus Tatius.⁹ The second, Numa, was also a Sabine.¹⁰ The third, Tullus Hostilius, was a Latin, as was the fourth, Ancus Marcius, but Marcius was also the grandson of the Sabine Numa.¹¹ The fifth king, Lucius Tarquinius Priscus, had been born in Etruria, but his father was the Greek Demaratus of Corinth.¹² The sixth, Servius Tullius, was the child of a noble woman from the Latin city of Corniculum. He was brought up in Tarquinius' household and married to his daughter.¹³ {128} The seventh and last king, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, was the son of the Greco-Etruscan Tarquinius Priscus.¹⁴

When later generations of Romans imagined the early history of their city, they pictured a society with porous borders. In the families of the Roman kings we see dynasties that shifted from place to place and changed ethnicity between generations. The leading families of Rome may even have sought out foreigners for their kings to avoid internal factional conflict. The cultures with which Rome had extensive contact in its early centuries are all reflected here: Latins, Sabines, Etruscans, and the occasional Greek.

Latins, Sabines, and Etruscans

As early as the seventh century BCE, an alliance existed among several of the Latin cities, termed the Latin League by modern historians. The origins of this alliance are obscure, but it was evidently a compact of mutual defense aimed at protecting Latium from foreign encroachment. Rome was not an original member of the league, but the growth of Roman power in the sixth century led to Rome assuming a leading role in its military organization. The first treaty between Rome and Carthage in 509, which asserted Roman authority over Latium, probably exaggerated the real scope of Rome's power.¹⁵ A treaty between Rome and the Latin cities from 493 put Romans and Latins on an equal footing with promises of mutual aid, fair sharing of booty, and access to the courts in any city.¹⁶ Despite this treaty, relations between Rome and the other Latin cities were turbulent. A series of wars between Rome and the Latins in the fourth century ended with the Latin cities incorporated into the Roman state.¹⁷ Many Latin

communities gained Roman citizenship, although some who had been especially troublesome were left with only the traditional Latin rights.¹⁸

Like the Latins, the Sabines' history with Rome was complicated. From the hill regions east of Rome, the Sabines fought a series of wars against the Romans over the seventh through fifth centuries.¹⁹ At the same time, Sabines figure among the kings of Rome, and several prominent Roman families {129} claimed Sabine ancestry.²⁰ The Roman legend of the Sabine women attempted to reconcile these different kinds of interaction. According to this tale, once Romulus and his mostly male followers had founded Rome, they were in need of wives, so by deception they carried off a number of Sabine women whom they then talked into marriage. This affront provoked a war that was ended when the Sabine women persuaded their angry fathers and brothers to make peace.²¹ The Sabines were thus incorporated into the new Roman state, with their king, Titus Tatius, becoming co-king with Romulus.²²

This legend reflects a Roman sense of the past that included both conflict and cohabitation with Sabines. Extensive Roman-Sabine cultural interaction also appears in the Roman adoption of Sabine deities. The Roman antiquarian Varro recorded a long list of Roman gods who came from the Sabines, including such significant figures as Minerva, the goddess of wisdom; Vulcan, the god of the forge; and the Lares, a diverse group of protective spirits.²³ Although modern scholarship casts doubt on some of these claims, the belief that Sabines had played an important role in the creation of Rome was part of later Romans' sense of history.²⁴

The most powerful of early Rome's neighbors were the Etruscans, a people native to Etruria in northern Italy (modern Tuscany).²⁵ Starting in the eighth century, the Etruscans leveraged their control of metal resources and their position in the trade routes connecting western and northern Europe with the Mediterranean to acquire great wealth and power.²⁶ They exercised a zone of political and cultural influence that included the early city of Rome, as reflected in the Etruscan connections of some of the Roman kings.²⁷ The {130} expansion of Roman power led to a long series of wars that ended with the Roman conquest of Etruria in the third century BCE.²⁸

Despite these conflicts, Rome and Etruria were deeply interconnected, and elements of Etruscan culture were incorporated into Roman tradition. Roman religion adopted the *Etrusca disciplina*, or Etruscan method of augury, just as Roman politics adopted the ceremony of a triumphal chariot procession for victorious generals from Etruscan models. Etruscan visual and material culture, especially their expert metalwork, shaped early Roman art. Romans credited Etruscans with the invention of gladiatorial combat, although that attribution has been questioned.²⁹ Etruscan trade connections were also important in mediating early Roman contacts with the Greek world. Thus, for example, the Greek hero Heracles became the Etruscan Herkle, who in turn became the Roman Hercules.³⁰ The story that the Romans told about the conquest of the nearby Etruscan city of Veii is fitting. According to legend, the Roman general

offered Juno, the city's patron goddess, a better temple in Rome, and the statue of Juno nodded her assent to the transfer, marking the passage of the city into Roman hands.³¹ What was Etruscan could readily become Roman.

The formation of Rome and its early contacts with Latins, Sabines, and Etruscans set a pattern that continued for much of Roman history. Rome was accessible to outsiders, and the Romans became entangled in the political and cultural spheres of other peoples through trade and migration. Romans were not hesitant to go to war and their entanglements with other peoples provided the pretexts for aggressive expansion.³² In the immediate aftermath of conflict, the fate of the defeated was often slavery or death, but over the long {131} term Rome chose to incorporate its defeated enemies rather than subjugate or displace them.



{131} Etruscan bronze statue of the mythical Chimaera, made around 400 BCE and currently in the National Archaeological Museum, Florence. This fine sculpture displays both Etruscan familiarity with Greek mythology and the high level of skill of Etruscan metalwork.

These additions to the Roman state were not always incorporated on favorable terms. Some were granted full citizen rights, while others gained citizen status without the right to vote in Roman elections. Other peoples did not receive citizen status but were treated as Latins. Romans also established colonies of their own citizens in lands expropriated from some defeated communities. All these peoples were required to follow the Roman lead in foreign relations and to contribute soldiers to the Roman army. This system of incorporation greatly expanded the pool of military recruits the Romans could draw on for further conquests. The Romans' ability to replace lost troops with fresh soldiers provided a decisive advantage even over better-trained professional armies.³³

These processes were repeated throughout the Italian peninsula. Umbrians, Campanians, Samnites, colonial Greeks, and most other peoples inhabiting Italy were absorbed into the expanding Roman state in much the same way that Latins, Sabines, and Etruscans had been before them. By the fourth century BCE, the Romans were beginning to present themselves as the leaders {132} of a unified Italy, and, like the Macedonian kings before them, the Roman political elite understood that the best way to hold together a fractious political alliance is to identify a common enemy. They found convenient enemies in two other peoples: the Gauls of northern Italy and the Carthaginians of North Africa.

The Gauls and Italy

“Gaul” and “Celt,” like “Greek,” are names given by outsiders. The people we call “Gauls” or “Celts” were never unified on their own initiative. While they spoke related languages and had some cultural traits in common, there is little to suggest that they ever had a shared identity. The image of a common Gaulish culture is a product of ancient Greek and Roman perceptions and modern romanticism. Greek writers used the term *Keltai* to refer to peoples of northwestern Europe in general. Romans used the term *Galli* with similar breadth.³⁴ These words have given us our English terms “Celt” and “Gaul.” Nineteenth-century historians believed that a “Celtic” culture had emerged in eastern France and southern Germany around 500 BCE and rapidly expanded into Western Europe, the Danube valley, and northern Italy, conquering or displacing native inhabitants as they went. Modern archaeology has revealed a different picture of European prehistory.³⁵

Between roughly 4000 and 1000 BCE, a set of shared cultural traits gradually diffused among peoples inhabiting the Atlantic coast of Europe from Portugal to Scotland. These traits included skills in extracting and working the region’s rich metal deposits, techniques of boat building and navigation, the custom of building megalithic monuments, and an assortment of related languages. The peoples of this region were not part of a single culture but were bound together by trade connections and had generally similar economic and political structures, making up a cultural “system” rather than an ethnic identity. Archaeologist Barry Cunliffe has dubbed this system “Atlantic” in contrast to the similarly broad “Mediterranean” and “Continental” systems distributed across other parts of Europe.³⁶

There had long been trade connections between northwestern Europe and the Mediterranean. In the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, Phoenician and Greek traders sailed into the Atlantic seeking sources of copper, tin, and gold. {133} By the sixth century, new centers of exchange were emerging in regions connecting the headwaters of major rivers, such as the Seine, Rhine, Rhone, and Danube in central Western Europe and the Ebro and Tago in Iberia. Fortified hilltop settlements and burials rich with imported luxury goods in these areas mark the

emergence of a new elite enriched by trade. In Iberia, this cultural configuration is called “Celtiberian”; in eastern France and southern Germany, “Hallstatt,” from the site where its archaeological traces were first identified.

The trade-centered Hallstatt society soon broke down, and by the fifth century BCE a new elite had taken its place. This new cultural configuration, called “La Tène,” placed a greater value on warrior status. While Hallstatt chiefs had been buried with four-wheeled wagons of the kind used to carry trade goods from one river’s headwaters to the next, La Tène chiefs were buried with two-wheeled war chariots. The competition for power among the new warlords drove some to uproot their followers and seek more fertile ground elsewhere. Beginning in the later fifth century, mobile bands of warriors with their families and dependents spread from the La Tène centers into other parts of Europe, many following old trade routes toward the Mediterranean.³⁷

Greeks and Romans described the movement of people across the Alps into the Po valley of northern Italy in the fifth century as an invasion. Modern scholarship has, until recently, tended to do the same, going so far as to imagine that the population of the Po valley was expelled or exterminated to make way for a total resettlement by Gauls.³⁸ As with other cases of cultural change, more recent interpretations have challenged the idea of mass migration and posited instead cultural changes caused by the arrival of a new elite into a relatively stable population.³⁹ By disrupting existing power structures and displaying a competing set of cultural values, even a small number of immigrants could have dramatic effects on local society. Local people who embraced the newcomers’ ways of life may be indistinguishable to us from the immigrants themselves.

Roman and Greek authors chose, for their own purposes, to connect the warrior aristocracy that arose in the Po valley with peoples who lived north of the Alps. The Romans made the point clearer by referring to the Po region as “Cisalpine Gaul,” or “Gaul on this side of the Alps,” in contrast to “Transalpine Gaul,” roughly the area of modern-day France and Belgium. Modern usage follows the classical precedents, and we conventionally call the peoples of these regions “Gauls,” but this is only a term of convenience. We do not know how the people of the Po valley conceived of their own identities.⁴⁰

{134} Gaulish warriors were soon involved in Etruria. In some cases, they raided Etruscan cities for booty or extorted protection money from them. At other times, they were hired as mercenaries by leading Etruscan families to fight in their internal conflicts or in the long series of wars against Rome. As the Gauls strengthened their position in the Po valley, their range increased. Gaulish raiding extended into central Italy and Gaulish mercenaries took service as far away as Sicily.⁴¹

Gauls, as mercenaries, traders, and raiders, had been on the periphery of the Roman sphere of influence for a few generations when Roman-Gaulish relations took a dramatic turn in the early fourth century. According to Roman legends, around 390 BCE, Roman envoys—who, by the customs of diplomacy, should have remained neutral—got involved in a fight between Etruscans and Gauls and

killed a Gaulish chieftain. The Gauls demanded recompense from Rome. When the Romans refused, the Gauls marched on Rome and defeated the hastily raised army sent to confront them at the Allia River. With Rome undefended, the Gauls captured most of the city. A small Roman force held out and negotiated for the safety of the city, settling on a payment of a thousand pounds of gold. The Gauls used unbalanced scales to weigh out the payment. When a Roman objected, the Gaulish leader added his sword to the scales to unbalance them further and declared: “Woe to the defeated.” Before the humiliating payment could be measured out, though, the Romans rallied and drove the Gauls from the city.⁴²

As with other legends of early Rome, this story is more myth than history, but it is a myth with a point.⁴³ The image of the Gaulish leader mocking the defeated Romans stands in sharp contrast to the Sabine women pleading for the brotherhood of Romans and Sabines or an Etruscan goddess consenting to be moved to Rome. In reality, Gaulish raiding was no worse than what Romans, Latins, Sabines, Etruscans, Umbrians, and other Italians had been doing to each other for centuries. And yet when later Romans looked back on this history, they mostly chose to remember the things that bound them together with other peoples. They told the story of how Juno consented to come to Rome from Veii, not how the people of the defeated city had been sold off as slaves. The Gauls were a different matter. Roman memory of the Gauls emphasized their strangeness and menace. There were no comforting stories about how the Gauls could become Roman. Indeed, Roman legends probably exaggerated the seriousness of the defeat at the Allia and the Gaulish raid on Rome.⁴⁴ By the end of the third century, Rome had conquered and {135} absorbed the Po valley, but even when the threat of Gaulish raiding had been neutralized, Romans still tended to depict the Gauls as alien and dangerous.⁴⁵

Antipathy to the Gauls had a long life in Rome. In 69 BCE the statesman and lawyer Cicero, defending Marcus Fonteius against charges of corruption during his governorship in Transalpine Gaul, invoked the image of menacing Gaulish raiders in order to cast doubt on the testimony of a Gaulish witness.⁴⁶ The historian Suetonius listed the enrolling of senators from Cisalpine Gaul, a few decades later, as evidence of Julius Caesar’s contempt for Roman tradition.⁴⁷ In the first century CE, when the emperor Claudius proposed admitting Transalpine Gauls to the Senate, reluctant senators decried the Gauls as hostile barbarians.⁴⁸ Unlike other peoples, the Gauls did not find a welcome in Rome even after they had been defeated.

The Gauls in the Roman Imagination

Anti-Gaulish prejudice was established in Rome before Greek literature became a part of Roman culture, but Greek ways of thinking provided a theoretical framework in which Roman disdain for the Gauls could lodge.⁴⁹ In much the same way that Herodotus had created a north-south axis around Greece in which

the young, mobile, fierce Scythians balanced the old, sedentary, wise Egyptians, with Greeks occupying the favored middle, Greek narratives about the Persians provided the basis for a similar east-west axis that explained the Gauls. Conventional stereotypes of the Persians—luxurious, subservient, despotic—were inverted to create the main themes of Gaulish ethnography.

While the Persians lived under a bureaucratic monarchy, the Gauls were pictured as disorganized and fractious. Both peoples were blamed for lacking self-control, but in Persians it was thought to manifest in a lack of independent spirit. Gauls, by contrast, had too much spirit; they were depicted as drunk, undisciplined, and ruled by their passions. While Persian wealth had always been contrasted with Greek poverty, Gaulish poverty was described as so extreme that they lacked even the rudiments of civilized life. As with Greek views of the Persians, conventional narratives of Gaulish inferiority {136} were readily deployed for Greek and Roman audiences, but they were never universal or consistent.

The earliest author whose writings on the Italian Gauls survive is Polybius. Polybius was a Greek hostage in Rome in the early second century when the conquest of Cisalpine Gaul was still fresh in popular memory. He wrote his history on the basis of his contacts with the Roman elite but primarily for a Greek audience who had recently experienced raiding by Gauls from the lower Danube. His overview of Gaulish history hit conventional notes:

They lived in unwall'd villages without permanent structures. Sleeping on leaves and eating meat, they knew nothing but war and farming; they lived simple lives and had no acquaintance with any art or science. . . . They not only dominated the inhabitants [of the Po valley], but terrified many neighboring peoples into submission with their audacity.⁵⁰

In the planning of their attacks and the confusion with which they carried them out, they were utterly contemptible; not just in most things but in everything the Gauls did they were guided by passion rather than reason.⁵¹

The usual anti-Gaulish stereotypes are in full force here: poverty, disorganization, violence, and the inability to act with reason or discipline.

The details of Polybius' narrative, however, do not match up with these sweeping statements. He recorded the Gauls organizing large-scale alliances, debating policy and strategy, and conducting diplomatic affairs. His descriptions of Gauls in battle showed them as tenacious and well-disciplined fighters. In particular, he noted an occasion on which a Gaulish army, finding itself caught between two Roman armies, drew up in a novel double-fronted formation that allowed them to face both oncoming forces at once. Polybius called this formation "not only awe-inspiring but well-suited to the occasion."⁵² The anti-

Gaulish narrative was so strong that Polybius himself seems not to have realized how poorly the details of his history accord with his overall judgments.

The Roman censor Marcus Porcius Cato (known today as Cato the Elder, to distinguish him from his great-grandson, an opponent of Julius Caesar) also wrote about the Gauls of northern Italy in his work *Origins*, which has survived only in fragments.⁵³ Cato said that the Gauls devoted themselves to war and to cunning talk.⁵⁴ He praised the fertility of the Po valley—in his day, newly settled with Roman colonists—and described the Gauls raising {137} pigs so fat they could not walk but had to be carried in a cart.⁵⁵ Cato's image differs in important ways from Polybius'. The fertility of the Gauls' land and the girth of their livestock indicate wealth, not poverty. The reference to their "cunning talk" gives them credit for more wit than Polybius' almost bestial creatures.

Polybius and Cato moved in the center of Roman society, and their view of the Gauls must reflect contemporary Roman attitudes. Their writings show that multiple narratives were available in Roman discourse to be deployed as circumstances demanded.⁵⁶ Polybius could point to the Gauls' poverty and ignorance when he wanted to reassure his readers that they were not a threat to be feared, while Cato could just as easily point to their wealth and cunning in order to praise the Roman conquest of their land. Roman ideas about the Latins, Sabines, and Etruscans must have been similarly multifaceted. Why, then, did the positive views of these peoples tend to rise to the surface, while negative views of the Gauls became standard?

The wars between Romans and Gauls were long and hard-fought, but no more so than Rome's other wars in Italy. Indeed, they were often the same wars, since the Gauls frequently made alliances with or served as mercenaries for other Italian peoples.⁵⁷ By the early second century BCE, any threat to Rome from the Italian Gauls had been effectively ended, but anti-Gaulish attitudes endured for centuries after. The Samnites of southern Italy, by contrast, resisted Rome until the early first century BCE, but there is evidence for people of Samnite origin in the Roman upper class within a few generations, including one Marcus Lollius who served as consul in 21 BCE. Roman sources record no outcry at the idea of Samnite senators.⁵⁸

The structure of Gaulish society made it difficult for the Romans to deal with. Though Polybius was exaggerating when he pictured them sleeping on leaves in rickety hovels, most of Gaulish culture in the Po valley was unlike the complex urbanized societies of central Italy. It was a society of mobile warrior bands held together by ties of personal loyalty. These bands could form and dissolve quickly depending on the fortunes of their leaders. The fluidity of Gaulish politics was frustrating to Romans, who were accustomed to city-state societies.⁵⁹ There were other parts of Cisalpine Gaul, however, where Romans did make reliable partnerships. North of the Po, in the {138} approaches to the Alpine passes, larger and more stable political configurations had taken shape, including the towns of Mediolanum (modern Milan) and Brixia (Brescia). These fortified settlements and others of the same type, called *oppida* (singular *oppidum*),

represent the beginnings of urbanization and the creation of stable bases of power for a regional aristocracy more interested in controlling trade routes than raiding for plunder.⁶⁰ The rulers of these towns aligned themselves with Rome and proved to be reliable allies, but conventional Roman narratives took no account of them.⁶¹

The Romans' enduring animosity to the Gauls was dictated by political needs, not by cultural differences or histories of conflict. As Rome began to compete on the stage of international politics, it became useful to position the city as the force leading the fight for common interests and against common enemies. In Rome's early days, the Etruscans were the dominant political forces in the central Italian peninsula. When Rome was starting to assert itself in Italian affairs in the fourth and fifth centuries, one common concern of the Etruscan cities was the threat of Gaulish raiding.⁶² As Rome began to operate in a larger Mediterranean sphere in the third and second centuries, the terms of international relations were largely set by the Hellenistic kingdoms, among whose major concerns were the Gauls or Galatians and their raids in Greece and Anatolia.⁶³ It was politically useful for the Romans to highlight their animosity toward the Gauls and their ability to take the lead in dealing with the problem. The Gauls were the barbarians Rome needed.

Rome and Carthage

As the Romans solidified their control of Italy and began to exercise influence in the western Mediterranean, they needed a new common enemy to unite the people under their hegemony. They found that new enemy across the sea in Carthage.

Carthage had been founded as a colony of the Phoenician city of Tyre. The Greek word for a Phoenician, *Phoinix*, became *Punicus* in Latin. The Romans referred to the people of the city interchangeably as *Carthaginienses* or *Punici*, and both words have come into English as "Carthaginian" and "Punic." The {139} foundation of the city is credited to a princess named Elissa, called Dido in later traditions.⁶⁴ The historicity of Elissa/Dido is uncertain, but textual and archaeological sources agree that the city was founded in the late ninth century BCE.⁶⁵ Carthage became a major trading center, boasting an excellent natural harbor and positioned at a nexus of trade routes spanning the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert.

The earliest documented contact between Rome and Carthage is a treaty traditionally dated to 509—not coincidentally, also the traditional date of the founding of the Roman Republic.⁶⁶ The treaty defined spheres of economic influence and allowed Romans limited access to Carthaginian ports while protecting Carthage's dominance of western Mediterranean trade.⁶⁷ At the time, Rome was only a small state with regional influence while Carthage was entering its prime as a commercial empire. Gaining Carthage's recognition as a state

worthy of diplomatic engagement was an important validation for early Rome.

This treaty was renewed with substantially the same terms in 348, showing that Carthage was still the dominant force in the western Mediterranean and Rome a growing but still regional power.⁶⁸ By 306, however, Rome was the leading state in Italy and beginning to exert a wider influence. A new treaty concluded in this year put Rome and Carthage on a more equal footing. Italy was designated Rome's sphere of influence in which Carthage promised not to interfere. Sicily was assigned on the same terms to Carthage.⁶⁹ These claims were somewhat ambitious on both sides. The Romans faced several more decades of hard fighting against Etruscans, Samnites, Greeks, and Gauls before they could claim supremacy over all of Italy. Though Carthage had a {140} firm grip on western Sicily, the Greek cities on the eastern half of the island, particularly Syracuse, were putting up stiff resistance. Syracuse had made an alliance with several Etruscan cities and employed Gaulish, Etruscan, Campanian, and Samnite mercenaries in the fight against Carthage.⁷⁰ In the treaty of 306, Rome and Carthage were aligning themselves against common enemies of the moment but also looking ahead to the outcome of their own territorial ambitions.

The third century saw Roman-Carthaginian relations deteriorate. In 282 a diplomatic crisis—possibly provoked by the Romans—erupted between Rome and Tarentum, the leading Greek city in Italy.⁷¹ Tarentum (Taranto) looked across the sea for aid and made an alliance with King Pyrrhus of Epirus, a second cousin of Alexander the Great who was ambitious to equal his relative's eastern victories in the West. Pyrrhus attempted to negotiate an alliance with Carthage against Rome, but the Carthaginians refused and revived their alliance with Rome instead. In the winter of 279–278, the Romans and Carthaginians renewed the essentials of their treaty of 306 and added an alliance against Pyrrhus, promising that neither would make a separate peace and laying down terms by which Carthage could render naval aid to the Romans, who had never fought overseas before.⁷²

The war, however, strained relations between Rome and Carthage. Both powers transgressed the spirit of their treaty without violating its letter.⁷³ After defeating Pyrrhus in 275, the Romans took actions that anticipated a future conflict with Carthage, including building up their navy, founding new colonies on the coast of southern Italy, and opening diplomatic relations with the Ptolemaic kings of Egypt, who were rivals of Carthage in Mediterranean and North African trade.⁷⁴

The decisive turn in Roman-Carthaginian relations came in 264. A group of Italian mercenaries called the Mamertines had seized control of the Sicilian city of Messina (Messina). When Syracuse tried to dislodge them, these mercenaries appealed to both Rome and Carthage for aid. Carthage negotiated a truce and stationed a garrison in Messina to stabilize the situation. Unhappy with this result, the Mamertines sought Roman protection instead, even {141} though Rome had recently suppressed a similar takeover of the Italian city of Rhegium (Reggio Calabria) with brutal force. When the Roman Senate took up the

Mamertines' appeal, it was clear that intervening in Messina would mean violating the treaty with Carthage and contradicting the example recently set in Rhegium. They nevertheless allowed a vote for war to go forward.⁷⁵

The war that followed, known as the First Punic War, was a struggle for control of Sicily that lasted from 264 to 241. After a long war of attrition, Carthage was forced to cede all of Sicily and pay a huge indemnity to Rome. In the turmoil that followed, when Carthage fought an internal war against mercenaries it could no longer afford to pay, Rome seized further Carthaginian possessions in the Mediterranean. Roman propaganda worked hard to justify the war, but an awareness of Roman aggression and the flimsiness of the pretexts for war is evident in the sources.⁷⁶

The rest of Roman-Carthaginian history follows, in a sense, from the First Punic War. With their finances crippled by the loss of Sicily, the Carthaginians had to seek resources elsewhere. They began a program of imperial conquest on the Iberian Peninsula, which led them once again into conflict with Rome, whose interests in Iberia were also expanding. A further treaty, agreed in 226, once again attempted to define spheres of influence by setting the Ebro River as the boundary between Roman and Carthaginian interests.⁷⁷ War was sparked again, however, by conflict over the city of Saguntum (Sagunto), which lay far on the Carthaginian side of the Ebro, but with which the Romans had made an alliance. The details of the events, including whether Saguntum became a Roman ally before or after the treaty of 226, are hopelessly muddled in the sources. Nevertheless, Saguntum was only a pretext for a war that both sides knew was coming.⁷⁸

In 218 the Carthaginian general Hannibal assembled an army drawn from North Africa, Spain, and Gaul, and they marched from Spain along the Mediterranean coast over the Alps into Italy. The Romans, who had already begun preparations for a war in Spain, were caught off guard and scrambled to mount a defense. Yet it was not on the battlefield that Hannibal hoped to win the war. The war against Pyrrhus and the First Punic War had proven the importance of Rome's ability to mobilize vast numbers of troops from its Italian allies and subjects. Carthage, dependent on paid mercenaries, had to neutralize this advantage. Hannibal's strategic goal was to dismantle the Roman hegemony in Italy.

Hannibal had grounds for hope. Much of Italy had come under Roman control only after wars of conquest, many of them long and brutal. Communities that fell under Roman domination were impoverished by land seizures. Even those communities who fared well under Roman authority found themselves sending their young men off to fight and die in Roman wars on which they had no say. The notion that Hannibal could inspire Rome's subjects into revolt was not a foolish one.

Reasonable though this hope might have been, it was not fulfilled. Much of southern Italy, which had only recently been conquered, accepted Hannibal's invitation to rebel. The biggest prize was Capua, a major city and previously loyal

Roman ally. Most of Italy, however, and especially the central Italian regions, remained faithful to Rome. Most of the communities that joined Hannibal were too small and impoverished to contribute significantly to the war effort. In the end, no mass revolt against Roman authority occurred.⁷⁹

It was not that Rome was loved. The resentment on which Hannibal tried to play was real. Many Italians felt that they were bearing the burdens of wars from which Rome reaped the profit. It was rather that Rome, for all its flaws, offered something that Carthage could not. The Romans had proven themselves capable of leading mixed armies of Italian peoples against common foes. The peace they had created by suppressing inter-Italian conflict was enforced with brutality, but it was peace nonetheless. When Hannibal offered freedom to the Italians, the promise must have rung hollow to many.⁸⁰ What “freedom” could Carthage offer? Freedom to be raided by the Gauls who were Hannibal’s allies? Freedom to go back to fighting endless wars against their neighbors? Freedom to trade Roman domination for Capuan domination? Italians may have had cause to resent Rome, but they preferred the devil they knew. In the late third century, Rome’s claim to have created a united Italy was beginning to become more reality than propaganda.

Roman campaigns in Spain gradually pushed back Carthaginian control there, but efforts to distract, dislodge, or divert Hannibal’s forces in Italy were unsuccessful until Rome finally brought the war to Africa. A Roman army landed near Carthage in 204 and soon won several victories against Carthaginian forces. Rome had allies among the Numidians of North Africa. After their early successes, the Roman army in Africa helped the pro-Roman king Masinissa solidify his control of Numidia and open another front against Carthage. In 201 Carthage was compelled to make peace with Rome on terms [143] that included the surrender of territory to Masinissa, the effective destruction of the Carthaginian navy, and the payment of an enormous indemnity over a period of fifty years.⁸¹

As the end of the fifty-year period drew near, the Roman Senate began looking for pretexts to start a third war.⁸² Masinissa was encouraged to encroach on Carthaginian territory, and Carthaginian pleas for a peaceful settlement were rebuffed.⁸³ When Carthage finally responded in force, Rome claimed the defense of their Numidian ally as a cause for war. In 146, after a brief war, Roman armies destroyed Carthage once and for all.

Carthage Must Be Destroyed

It is easy to look back on Roman-Carthaginian history and see the two powers as natural enemies destined to fight to the death. We have little evidence for what Carthaginians thought of Rome, but examples of Roman hatred for Carthage are numerous. Cato endlessly pestered the Senate with the refrain that “Carthage must be destroyed.”⁸⁴ The legend of Romans sowing salt in the ruins of Carthage

is a modern invention, but the destruction of the city and its people after the Third Punic War was carried out with unusual ruthlessness. The city was razed to the ground and its population killed or sold into slavery.⁸⁵ More than a century later, the site of the city was still regarded as cursed.⁸⁶

The virulence of Roman hatred for Carthage, however, has been exaggerated.⁸⁷ For more than two centuries, Rome and Carthage were on amicable terms. Diplomatic recognition from Carthage was valuable to the young Roman Republic, and Rome made a useful ally for Carthage against Etruscan competition. Rome and Carthage contemplated joint action against Pyrrhus, even if it never materialized. Even centuries later, the Roman historian Livy, indulging in a little historical fiction, imagined that if Alexander had chosen to march west, Rome and Carthage would have allied against him.⁸⁸ It was {144} not the inexorable pressure of fate that drove Rome and Carthage into war, but the deliberate decision of Rome's political class to provoke confrontation by interfering in Carthaginian affairs in Sicily, Spain, and Africa.⁸⁹ Even in the sources written by the victors, the Roman Senate's eagerness for war with Carthage is palpable.⁹⁰

Sources contemporary with the wars are mild in their attitudes toward Carthaginians. The Roman playwright Plautus' comedy *Poenulus*, produced about a decade after the end of the Second Punic War, featured a Carthaginian, Hanno, as a sympathetic figure who ends the play happily reunited with his kidnapped daughters.⁹¹ Polybius was conspicuously evenhanded in his treatment of the Carthaginians, presenting them more as worthy adversaries than as despicable others.⁹² Cato excoriated the Carthaginians as breakers of treaties, but his insistence on the point looks like covering for Roman transgressions.⁹³ It is telling that Polybius was much more concerned to defend the Romans from charges of treachery than to lay blame against Carthage.⁹⁴

A consistent anti-Punic narrative only took shape in Roman literature a century after the destruction of Carthage. By the late first century BCE, the slur of *Punica fides*, "Punic faith," that is, bad faith, had become conventional.⁹⁵ Cato's accusations of treaty breaking were repeated, and Carthaginian treachery became a standard topic in school debate exercises.⁹⁶ First-century writers expanded on the theme and depicted Carthaginians as innately deceitful.⁹⁷ The first century was also a period of unrest and civil war in the Roman world, a time when Romans often fought and betrayed one another. The recasting of Carthage as a nation of treacherous villains had more to do with the need to reassert traditional Roman values in a time of crisis than with the experience of war itself.

Nor was the image of untrustworthy Carthaginians universal in Rome. The legend of Dido and Aeneas reversed the roles of duplicity and honesty.⁹⁸ In this legend, which became popular as Romans became familiar with Greek {145} myths, Romulus and Remus were made the descendants of the Trojan prince Aeneas, who led the surviving Trojans from Anatolia to Italy after the Greeks captured Troy. On their way, they were blown off course onto the shores of North Africa, where Aeneas fell in love with Dido. Driven by destiny, however,

he betrayed her trust and abandoned her. This story is the centerpiece of the first half of the poet Virgil's epic retelling of the founding of Rome, the *Aeneid*.⁹⁹ The poet Ovid, too, took up the character of Dido and wrote an imaginary letter in which she castigated Aeneas for his faithlessness.¹⁰⁰

Like the Gauls of northern Italy, Carthage was a convenient enemy against whom the Romans could mobilize their Italian allies. After Carthage had been destroyed, it became a useful symbol in the political struggles of the late Republic. Hatred of Carthage in Rome, like hatred of Gauls, was expressed primarily by the political class for specific political purposes.¹⁰¹ When Cato called for the destruction of Carthage, he was speaking both to and for a narrow section of Rome's elite. Indeed, the fact that Cato had to argue so long and hard for destroying Carthage suggests that the zeal for war was not widely shared.

A United Italy

The leaders of Rome did not stumble blindly into an empire but built their power deliberately over time. They were equally deliberate about how they described their relationships with the peoples they were fighting and conquering. An openness to outsiders was ingrained in Roman culture from the history of the city, assembled out of multiple villages at a crossroads of trade. The ideology of incorporation that was developed early on from the absorption of the Latins, Sabines, and Etruscans served Rome well as its hegemony expanded. Rome's nascent empire faced serious internal tensions, but the fact that it held together even under the pressures of the Second Punic War shows that there was substance to the Roman claim of having united all of Italy.

Gauls and Carthaginians were cast in the role of enemies by the Roman elite in the narrative of their own history. This narrative justified the rise of Roman power first as the leader of Italian resistance to Gaulish raiding, {146} later as the guarantor of stability in the Mediterranean against Carthaginian intrigues. After their defeat, these peoples remained part of Roman memory. A vanquished enemy ceases to be a rallying point for joint action but can become instead a symbol in the creation of an identity. The expansion of the Roman state was, in some senses, a search for new barbarians to lead the fight against once the old ones had been reduced to memories and stereotypes. As the Roman state continued to expand, it would find its new barbarians among the Transalpine Gauls, Britons, and Germans in the north and the Parthians in the east.

1. Livy, *History of Rome* 29.10–14. See also Varro, *The Latin Language* 6.15; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 2.19.4; Ovid, *Fasti* 4.247–348; Appian, *Hannibalic War* 56.

2. Livy 29.12.

3. Mary Beard, "The Roman and the Foreign: The Cult of the 'Great Mother' in Imperial Rome," in *Shamanism, History, and the State*, ed. Nichola Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Lynn Emrich Roller, *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 228–32.
4. Note the observations of Cicero, *Republic* 2.5–6.
5. Crook, *Law of Rome*, 43–45.
6. Livy 1.6–7; Ovid, *Fasti* 4.837–44; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.87.
7. Judith de Luce, "Roman Myth," *Classical World* 98, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 202–5.
8. Eutropius, *Compendium of Roman History* 1.1–8.
9. Livy 1.10–14; Tacitus, *Annals* 1.54; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2.36–52; Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Romulus" 19–24.
10. Livy 1.18; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2.58.
11. Livy 1.32; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 3.36.
12. Livy 1.34; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 3.46. Livy says that Tarquinius' given name was Lucumo, but since this name means "king" in Etruscan, the tradition may have confused Tarquinius' dynastic claims with his name. See Larissa Bonfante, *Etruscan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 60.
13. Livy 1.39; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.1. Livy's version is standard, although the record of a speech by the emperor Claudius testifies to an Etruscan alternative. See *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 13.1668.
14. Livy 1.47. Dionysius makes Superbus the grandson of Priscus. See Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.28.
15. Livy 1.50–52. Cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.49; Polybius, *Roman History* 3.22–26.
16. Dionysius of Halicarnassus 6.95.
17. Livy 6.2–32, 7.9–19, 8.2–6, 8.13.
18. Livy 8.14.
19. Livy 1.36–38, 2.16, 2.18, 2.26; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2.48–49, 5.40–43.
20. Livy 2.16; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 5.40; Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, "Tiberius" 1; Anne M. Keaney, "Three Sabine Nomina: Clausus, Cōnsus, *Fisus," *Glotta* 69, nos. 3/4 (1991): 202–14; Ronald Mellor, *The Roman Historians* (London: Routledge, 2002), 30.
21. Cicero, *Republic* 2.12–14; Ovid, *Fasti* 3.167–258; Livy 1.9–13; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2.30–47; Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Life of Romulus" 14–20.
22. Livy 1.33.
23. Varro, *The Latin Language* 5.74. Note also Ovid, *Fasti* 2.477–512.
24. Poucet gives the case against all the Sabine legends: Jacques Poucet, *Recherches sur la légende sabine des origines de Rome* (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université Louvain, 1967). See also Inez Gertrude Scott, "Evidence from Early Roman Religion Concerning the Growth of the City," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 60 (1929): 221–28; H. H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 79; Eric M. Orlin, "Foreign Cults in Republican Rome: Rethinking the Pomerian Rule," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 47 (2002): 1–18.
25. Despite the claims of older scholarship, the most recent genetic research finds no support for the belief that the Etruscans were immigrants from western Anatolia. See Ghirotto et al., "Etruscans' mtDNA."
26. Larissa Bonfante, "The Etruscans: Mediators between Northern Barbarians and Classical Civilization," in Bonfante, *Barbarians*, 233–81, esp. 233–36.
27. Alföldi, *Early Rome*, 176–235; Timothy Nolan Gantz, "The Tarquin Dynasty," *Historia* 24, no. 4 (1975): 539–54.
28. Livy 1.14–15, 1.27, 1.42, 1.55, 2.6–15, 2.42–51, 6.2–4, 6.9–10, 7.12, 7.15–22; Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 16.31, 16.36, 16.45.
29. Etrusca disciplina: Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 1.1; Bonfante, *Etruscan*, 51. Triumph: Larissa Bonfante Warren, "Roman Triumphs and Etruscan Kings: The Changing Face of the Triumph," *Journal of Roman Studies* 60 (1970): 49–66; H. S. Versnel, "Red (Herring?)

- Comments on a New Theory Concerning the Origin of the Triumph," *Numen* 53, no. 3 (2006): 290–326. Religion: Inez Scott Ryberg, "Was the Capitoline Triad Etruscan or Italic?" *American Journal of Philology* 52, no. 2 (1931): 145–53. Art: Pliny, *Natural History* 35.157; Emeline Hill Richardson, "The Etruscan Origin of Early Roman Sculpture," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 21 (1953): 77–124; Brendel, *Etruscan Art*, 19–21. Gladiators: Katherine E. Welch, *The Roman Amphitheatre: From Its Origins to the Colosseum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11–17.
30. Nancy Thomson de Grummond, *Etruscan Myth, Sacred History, and Legend* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2006), 12–13; Giuliano Bonfante and Larissa Bonfante, *The Etruscan Language: An Introduction* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2002), 203.
31. Livy 5.22.
32. Though from a later period, Harris's observations on Roman attitudes toward war are useful. See William V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome, 327–70 BC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 9–53.
33. The classic statement comes from Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Life of Pyrrhus" 21.10.
34. For example: Herodotus, *Histories* 2.33; Caesar, *Gallie War* 1.1; Diodorus of Sicily 5.32.
35. Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); P. Sims-Williams, "Celtomania and Celtoscepticism," *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 36 (Winter 1998): 1–36; Simon James, *The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).
36. Barry Cunliffe, *The Celts: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18–26; Cunliffe, "Celtic Twilight."
37. Cunliffe, "Celtic Twilight," 200–207.
38. Maria Teresa Grassi, *I Celti in Italia* (Milan: Longanesi, 1991), 61.
39. J. H. C. Williams, *Beyond the Rubicon: Romans and Gauls in Republican Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 199–200.
40. *Ibid.*, 202–3.
41. Dyson, *Roman Frontier*, 7–41.
42. Livy 5.35–49; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 13.12; Diodorus of Sicily, 14.113–16; Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Life of Camillus" 16–29. See also the fragments of Appian's *Gallie History*.
43. Veit Rosenberger, "The Gallic Disaster," *Classical World* 96, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 365–73.
44. R. Ross Holloway, *The Archaeology of Early Rome and Latium* (London: Routledge, 1994), 91–102; Rosenberger, "Gallic Disaster," 365. Cf. Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 176.
45. Bernhard Kremer, *Das Bild der Kelten bis in augusteische Zeit: Studien zur Instrumentalisierung eines antiken Feinbildes bei griechischen und römischen Autoren* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1994); Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 60–65.
46. Cicero, *For Fonteius* 27–36.
47. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, "The Divine Julius" 76.
48. Tacitus, *Annals* 23.
49. Williams, *Rubicon*, 18–67; Paul T. Keyser, "Greek Geography of the Western Barbarians," in Bonfante, *Barbarians*, 37–70.
50. Polybius 2.17–18.
51. Polybius 2.35.
52. Polybius 2.21–22, 2.25–28, 2.30, 2.34, quote at 2.28.
53. Hermann Peter, *Historicorum Romanorum Fragmenta* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1883), 40–67.
54. Cato the Elder, *Origins* 2 (quoted in Charisius, *Ars Grammatica* 2).
55. Cato the Elder, *Origins* 2 (cited in Varro, *On Farming* 1.2.7, 2.4.11; Columella, *Res Rustica* 3.3.2; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 14.52).
56. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 141–42.
57. Dyson, *Roman Frontier*, 19–26.
58. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Life of Sulla" 29.4; Strabo 5.4.11; Ronald Syme, "Senators, Tribes, and Towns," *Historia* 13, no. 1 (January 1964): 118; Ronald Syme, "More Narbonensian

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59. Dyson, *Roman Frontier*, 10–13, 42–43.
60. John Collis, *Defended Sites of the Late La Tène in Western Europe*, BAR Supplementary Series 2 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1975); Daphne Nash, "Growth of Urban Society in France," in *Oppida, the Beginnings of Urbanization in Barbarian Europe*, ed. Barry Cunliffe and Trevor Rowley, BAR Supplementary Series 11 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1976), 95–134.
61. Dyson, *Roman Frontier*, 42–43, 48–49.
62. Ibid., 11; Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 15–18.
63. Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 161; Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 11–15; Williams, *Rubicon*, 158–70.
64. Howard Jacobson, "Dido," *Mnemosyne*, 4th ser., 58, no. 4 (2005): 581–82.
65. I. M. Diakonoff, "The Naval Power and Trade of Tyre," *Israel Exploration Journal* 42, nos. 3/4 (1992): 176; Maria Eugenia Aubert, "Political and Economic Implications of the New Phoenician Chronologies," in *Beyond the Homeland: Markers in Phoenician Chronology*, ed. Claudia Sagona (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 179–91.
66. Polybius 3.22; R. L. Beaumont, "The Date of the First Treaty between Rome and Carthage," *Journal of Roman Studies* 29, part 1 (1939): 74–86.
67. Jean MacIntosh Turfa, "Evidence for Etruscan-Punic Relations," *American Journal of Archaeology* 81, no. 3 (Summer 1977): 368–74; John Serrati, "Neptune's Altars: The Treaties between Rome and Carthage (509–226 B.C.)," *Classical Quarterly*, n.s., 56, no. 1 (May 2006): 113–34.
68. Polybius 3.24; Diodorus of Sicily 16.69; Livy 7.27.
69. Polybius denies the existence of this treaty. See Polybius 3.26. Modern scholarship has tended to accept its existence. See M. Cary, "A Forgotten Treaty between Rome and Carthage," *Journal of Roman Studies* 9 (1919): 67–77; Richard E. Mitchell, "Roman-Carthaginian Treaties: 306 and 279/8 B.C.," *Historia* 20, nos. 5/6 (1971): 633–55; Serrati, "Neptune's Altars." Against this view, see Ernst Badian, *Foreign Clientelae, 264–70 B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 31; B. D. Hoyos, "Treaties True and False: The Error of Philinus of Agrigentum," *Classical Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1985): 92–109.
70. Polybius 1.7; Diodorus of Sicily 19.106, 20.11, 20.61; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 20.4; Strabo 6.2.3.
71. Even centuries later, the cause of the war was a contentious question: note how Dio and Zonaras stress the bad behavior of the Tarentines and leave out the Roman treaty violations mentioned by Appian. See Appian, *Samnite Wars* 15–17 (quoted in Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *The Embassies*); Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 9.39; Zonaras, *Epitome of History* 8.2.
72. Polybius 3.25; Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Life of Pyrrhus"; Justinus, *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus' Philippic Histories* 18.2.
73. Serrati, "Neptune's Altars," 128–30.
74. Naval construction: John Lydus, *De Magistratibus* 1.27. Colonies: William V. Harris, *Rome in Etruria and Umbria* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 155. Diplomacy: Eutropius 2.15; Appian, *Sicilian Wars* 1 (cited in Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *The Embassies*).
75. Polybius 1.7–11; Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 182–90.
76. Polybius 1.10, 1.88; Diodorus of Sicily 23.12; Eutropius 2.21.
77. Polybius 3.29.
78. E. T. Salmon, "The Strategy of the Second Punic War," *Greece and Rome* 7, no. 2 (October 1960): 131–42; G. V. Sumner, "Roman Policy in Spain Before the Hannibalic War," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 72 (1968): 205–46; Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 200–205; Serrati, "Neptune's Altars," 130–34.
79. Salmon, "Strategy," 138–39; B. D. Hoyos, "Hannibal, What Kind of Genius?" *Greece and Rome* 30, no. 2 (October 1983): 171–80; Andrew Erskine, "Hannibal and the Freedom of the Italians," *Hermes* 121, no. 1 (1993): 58–62; Michael P. Fronda, "Hegemony and Rivalry: The

- Revolt of Capua Revisited,” *Phoenix* 61, nos. 1/2 (Spring–Summer 2007): 83–108.
80. Polybius 3.77.
 81. Polybius 15.18.
 82. Polybius 32.2, 36.2; Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History* 1.12; Appian, *Punic Wars* 74.
 83. Appian, *Punic Wars* 68.
 84. Livy 49 (*Periochae*); Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Life of Marcus Cato” 27.1; Aurelius Victor, *On Illustrious Men* 47.8.
 85. Velleius Paterculus 1.12; Appian, *Punic Wars* 128–35; Orosius, *History against the Pagans* 4.23; R. T. Ridley, “To Be Taken with a Pinch of Salt: The Destruction of Carthage,” *Classical Philology* 81, no. 2 (April 1986): 140–46.
 86. Appian, *Punic Wars* 136.
 87. G. H. Waldherr, “‘Punica fides’—das Bild der Karthager in Rom,” *Gymnasium* 107 (2000): 193–222; Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 115–40.
 88. Livy 9.19.
 89. Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 182–90, 200–205, 234–40.
 90. Polybius 3.10, 32.2, 36.2; Velleius Paterculus 1.12; Appian, *Punic Wars* 68, 74; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 12.18, 13.55.10 (quoted in Zonaras, *Epitome of History* 8); John Lydus 1.27.
 91. Plautus, *Poenulus*.
 92. For example: Polybius 1.57–58, 2.1, 9.22–26, 11.2, 11.19, 36.9.
 93. Cato the Elder, *Origins* 4 (quoted in Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 10.1.10).
 94. Polybius 3.15, 3.26, 36.9.
 95. Ralph J. Hexter, “Sidonian Dido,” in *Innovations of Antiquity*, ed. Ralph J. Hexter and Daniel L. Selden (New York: Routledge, 1992), 332–84, esp. 345; Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 324–35; Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 122–32.
 96. Cicero, *De Inventione* 1.71.
 97. Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 7.4.4; Silius Italicus, *Punica* 3.231–34.
 98. Merle M. Odgers, “Some Appearances of the Dido Story,” *Classical Weekly* 18, no. 19 (March 23, 1925): 145–48.
 99. Virgil, *Aeneid* 4. John H. Starks Jr., “Fides Aeneia: The Transference of Punic Stereotypes in the *Aeneid*,” *Classical Journal* 94, no. 3 (February–March 1999).
 100. Ovid, *Heroides* 7.
 101. Like much of classical literature, elite Roman slurs against Carthage were long treated as fact by modern scholars. For example, Edward Wolters declares: “The Carthaginians seem to have made no contribution at all to the intellectual or moral riches of mankind.” Edward J. Wolters, “Carthage and Its People,” *Classical Journal* 47, no. 5 (February 1952): 191–94, 204. More recent scholarship has learned to treat Roman literature on Carthage with more skepticism.

{147} CHAPTER 8

AN EMPIRE OF BARBARIANS

In Virgil's epic poem about the origins of Rome, the *Aeneid*, the Trojan hero Aeneas' mother, the goddess Venus, begs Jupiter to reveal her son's fate. Jupiter comforts her with the promise that Aeneas will found a new nation in Italy: "For them I set no worldly limit or bounds of time, but grant them an empire without end."¹ A limitless empire would have to face the problem of what to do with the barbarians it kept conquering. Virgil had an answer to this question as well. In a vision of Rome's future, Aeneas' father Anchises counsels him: "Remember, Roman, that you shall rule the world's peoples by your power. These will be your arts: to impose the laws of peace, to be merciful to the conquered and subdue the arrogant."²

Virgil was striking a traditional note. Roman ideology had long relied on this distinction between two kinds of barbarians: the conquered ones who could be brought under the laws of Roman peace and the arrogant ones whom only Rome could subdue. Since their early conquests in Italy, Romans had portrayed themselves as the force that imposed order and civilization on a barbarian world.

As always, the reality was more complicated than the ideology. The success of Roman expansion depended on incorporating conquered peoples into the Roman state, but as the conquest of the Mediterranean proceeded, divisions were growing among the people already under Roman rule. The conflicts that threatened the stability of the late Roman Republic had many dimensions—rich versus poor, populace versus aristocrats, citizens versus noncitizens—but at the center of it all was one essential problem: the struggle of outsiders to become insiders.

Expansion and Transformation

Virgil was not alone in thinking of Rome as an empire without end. His contemporary, Ovid, declared that "though the lands of other peoples have fixed limits, the territory of Rome is the same as the world."³ As the statesman {148} Cicero noted, the greatest praise given to the great men of Rome in the past was that they had expanded the boundaries of Roman power.⁴

By the second century BCE, the boundaries of Roman power had expanded

well beyond Italy. Campaigns to conquer the mountainous regions of western Spain and the Alps went on decade after bloody decade. Rome fought Macedonia and proclaimed freedom for Greece, but when the Greeks used that freedom to fight wars among themselves, Greece was conquered, too. In 146, the same year that Carthage was finally destroyed, Rome made an example of Corinth by slaughtering the men, enslaving the women and children, and razing the city. By the middle of the second century, Rome had become the dominant power in the Mediterranean while the states that remained independent, such as Egypt and Pergamon, were adapting to the reality that their future lay in Rome's hands.

The constitution of the Roman Republic had been designed to ensure that all levels of society had some stake in the success of the state, especially in war. Victorious generals were rewarded with lavish celebrations and political influence, citizens of middling or higher income were liable for military service and came home enriched with plunder, and the populace enjoyed their share of the profits through spending on public works, entertainment, and distributions of food. This system, though never perfect, had given the Republic the stability and resources that made its earlier conquests possible. At the end of the second century BCE, cracks were starting to show.

The gap between the haves and the have-nots was widening. Much of Italy had never recovered from the Second Punic War. Italian subjects owed military service to Rome, and as longer wars were fought farther away, fewer of those soldiers came home again. Meanwhile, the profits of conquest increasingly went to the elite. The Roman economy had few options for investment, and members of the senatorial class were legally barred from engaging in trade. The rich poured their money into land and cheap slaves from conquests abroad. Tracts of farmland around Italy had been designated *ager publicus*, state-owned land that was supposed to be leased out in small parcels to the poor for family farms, but as land for sale in Italy became harder to find, the rich began illegally occupying large sections of the *ager publicus*. The variations in local economies throughout Italy meant that these pressures were felt differently in different regions, but the sense among the poor and landless that they were being taken advantage of by the rich and well-connected fed into a rising resentment of Rome.

Differences of status created by the piecemeal way Rome had incorporated its conquests added to the strain. Scattered around Italy there were some Roman citizens, who had full legal and political rights, some Latins, who had a more limited set of rights, and some peregrines, who had rights in their {149} home communities but were effectively foreigners to the laws and politics of Rome. Layered onto the diversity of legal statuses were other inequalities created by Roman traditions of patronage. In the competition for political influence, Roman aristocrats had long cultivated relationships with foreign peoples as a way of involving themselves in foreign policy.⁵ Some foreigners, either individuals or entire states, were recognized as "friends of the Roman people," an ambiguous status that carried some weight but was less than a formal alliance.⁶ The ambiguities of patronage allowed Romans to interpret these relationships as they

saw fit and demand deference from their clients and “friends.” As Rome expanded and absorbed its former neighbors, these diplomatic relationships hardened into an internal hierarchy that kept some communities in a subordinate status.

The vagaries of politics created further divides. The power to make law was formally vested in the assembly of Roman voters, and the Senate’s official role was only advisory. In practice, the aristocratic families in the Senate dominated political decision making and had numerous procedural tricks at their disposal to stymie popular initiatives.

Many of these divisions were laid bare in 133 when Tiberius Gracchus, a tribune (a magistrate of the Republic responsible for representing the interests of the common people), pushed forward land-reform proposals that would have redistributed *ager publicus* to many poor families. Members of the Senate used every legal means at their disposal to block the legislation, including denying funding to the commission that was to oversee the redistribution. At this moment of crisis, Gracchus learned through his patronage network that King Attalus III of Pergamon had died and willed his kingdom to Rome.⁷ Getting ahead of the Senate, Gracchus persuaded the assembly to assign the Pergamene revenues to his land commission. When it became clear that Gracchus was going ahead with his land redistribution, senators turned to force and murdered Gracchus and hundreds of his supporters in the street.⁸

The death of Gracchus was the start of a century of political violence that ended only when the Republic was replaced with a monarchy. Weakened by infighting, the late Republic was in a poor position to cope with the {150} mounting challenges of its piecemeal state. For several centuries the Republic had treated conquered subjects inconsistently and had unevenly distributed the burdens and profits of expansion. The consequences of that inconsistency now came home to Rome.

A Divided Italy

The Italian subjects, many of them nominally “allies” of Rome, had long been frustrated by the limitations of their status under Roman rule. Through the late second and early first centuries BCE, Italians sought fuller integration into the Republic, but their cause kept getting stalled as it became entangled with factional politics.

Events came to a head in 91 BCE with the assassination of the tribune Marcus Livius Drusus, who had advocated extending citizenship to all Italians (on the understanding that the newly enfranchised communities would all become his clients). Rome’s “allies” in much of Italy rose up in a revolt known as the Social War (from the Latin word for “ally,” *socius*). The Italians organized their own confederation to oppose Rome. The city of Corfinium was renamed Italica and designated capital of the confederation.⁹ Oscan, the language of several south

Italian peoples, was used as a common language in place of Latin, and coins were minted showing a bull—the symbol of the Italians—goring the Roman wolf.¹⁰ The war lasted until 88, and though the Romans won several key battles, hostilities were only ended when Rome acceded to the rebels' demand and extended Roman citizenship to all Italians.¹¹ Despite the extension of citizenship, problems of integration continued as factions wrangled over how to fit the new citizens into the complex Roman voting systems. Hopes for real equality remained unfulfilled.¹² Meanwhile, other resentments festered.

Large numbers of foreign slaves had been imported to Italy to work on the estates of the wealthy. A few were also assigned to fight in the arena as gladiators. In the late second century there were two major slave uprisings in Sicily, then in 73 a small uprising of slave gladiators in Capua grew into a massive revolt that drew in the disaffected peasants of southern Italy.¹³ While Roman sources name Spartacus as the leader of this group, it is unclear exactly how the rebelling slaves were organized, and it is hard to separate the historical {151} Spartacus from the figure of folk legend and propaganda.¹⁴ Although eventually defeated, this slave revolt lasted two years and threw the widespread dispossession of poor Italians into sharper relief.



A coin issued by the Italian allies in the Social War, showing the bull, the symbol of the Italians, goring a wolf, the symbol of Rome.

Unrest in Italy put further strain on the economy, and by the mid-60s there was agitation for relief of debts incurred by farmers trying to make ends meet. There were also more land troubles. A series of generals had seized power in Rome with the backing of their soldiers, and many of them had rewarded that loyalty by forcibly taking land to distribute to their troops. In 63 a coalition of desperate debtors, dispossessed farmers, and political outcasts banded together under the leadership of Catiline, a Roman aristocrat whose political ambitions

had been frustrated by factional conflicts.¹⁵ Their exact aims are unknown, since the uprising was quickly put down, but the fact that much of its support came from Etruria—a region with old ties to Rome that had not joined in the Social War—indicates how seriously reality was falling short of the ideal of a united Italy.¹⁶

As Italy fell apart, ambitious generals exploited the divisions by promising a return to the days of glorious expansion. Foreign conquests offered an enemy for Rome's people to rally against, brought in new wealth, and opened up new lands for Roman colonization, all of which could alleviate the stresses on the Republic.¹⁷ Pompey and Crassus, two generals who had led the fight against the slave uprising of 73, both sought commands against Rome's rivals in the East. Pompey campaigned extensively in Anatolia and the Levant. Crassus aimed higher and, as governor of Syria, embarked on an invasion of Parthia.

Parthian westward and Roman eastward expansion had run into each other in Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia where the two empires contended over the kingdom of Armenia.¹⁸ In the early first century, representatives of both powers had recognized the Euphrates River as a boundary, although the {152} Parthians seem to have taken this agreement more seriously than the Romans did.¹⁹ Crassus invaded Parthia in 53 and suffered a devastating defeat. Crassus was killed along with much of his army, the survivors were taken prisoner, and the army's standards were captured.²⁰

Meanwhile, Julius Caesar, another ambitious general, was expanding Roman power in the West. He began his campaign in Transalpine Gaul on the pretext of halting the migration of the Helvetii, a tribal coalition from the vicinity of modern Switzerland, but as the war continued with shifting justifications, it became clear that Caesar intended to conquer and plunder whatever he could get his hands on. Caesar's success in Gaul led to a new turn in Roman politics. In addition, the ways in which he presented that conquest to the Roman people reframed Roman perceptions of the peoples of northwestern Europe.

The Invention of Gaul and Germany

The societies of Transalpine Gaul had been shaped by the same migrations of warrior bands that had shaped the culture of the Po valley. The peoples of the region shared some cultural traits with the Cisalpine Gauls, but in many ways they were as diverse as the peoples of Italy. Some societies were small, tribal, and egalitarian, while others were large and complex, with powerful aristocracies and organized governments not unlike those of Greek or Italian cities. Some had been in contact with Greek, Etruscan, Roman, and Carthaginian traders for centuries, while others were relatively isolated.²¹ Despite Roman prejudices, some peoples of the region had established good relations with Rome. The Aedui had long been Roman allies, and Cicero hosted an Aeduan druid, Diviciacus, who visited Rome on a diplomatic mission.²² Other peoples had more unsettled relations

with Rome, such as the Allobroges. Their grievances against the Republic (over abuses by the governor of Roman-controlled southern Gaul) were severe enough that Catiline's followers approached them as potential coconspirators. The Allobroges chose to expose the plot rather than join it.²³ A decade later, they were among the tribes who allied with Caesar in his campaign.²⁴

Caesar's wars (58–50) consumed ally and enemy alike. The human cost of the conquests is difficult to calculate, but historians estimate that as much {153} as half the population of the region was killed or enslaved.²⁵ The survivors became subjects of Rome as Gaul was organized into Roman provinces. Caesar rewarded some favored allies with Latin or citizen status, but much of the territory was depopulated and impoverished by the war.²⁶

The absorption of this new territory and its people posed some problems. In the first place, the legitimacy of the war itself was dubious. Caesar's campaigns were opportunistic and driven by the desire for money and political prestige. His explanations of just who he was fighting and why kept shifting. The validity of Caesar's activity was even questioned in the Senate, with some going so far as to propose handing him over to the barbarians for his transgressions.²⁷ The idea of making provincials out of Gauls was not easily accepted in Rome. Gauls had played the role of bogeymen in Rome's narrative of its rise to power, and the image of Gaulish menace remained potent.²⁸ How could such a people be safely incorporated as subjects? Caesar's account of his campaign, *The Gallic War*, addressed these objections by redefining not only his activities in Gaul but the Gauls themselves.

Written in plain, engaging prose to appeal to a broad Italian audience, *The Gallic War* was also persuasive to many generations of modern historians. Caesar's objectivity as a writer was not widely questioned until the second half of the twentieth century.²⁹ More recent scholarship recognizes the propagandistic character of the work and its effect on Roman narratives about the Gauls.³⁰ We cannot expect objectivity about a culture from the man who was engaged in conquering it.

While existing Roman narratives about Gauls were neither uniform nor stable, there were familiar tropes: aggression, drunkenness, disorganization, and simplicity. The traditional narrative had been enriched not long before Caesar's campaigns by the account of Poseidonius, a Greek diplomat who traveled in Transalpine Gaul.³¹ Poseidonius described, in generally neutral {154} terms, a tribal society held together by the loyalty of warriors to their chiefs and the generosity of chiefs to their followers.³² Even the habit that most startled him at first—the practice of keeping the skulls of defeated enemies—he grew accustomed to with experience.³³ Despite the neutral tone of his remarks, the details of Poseidonius' account could be made to fit the conventional image of Gaulish menace.

Caesar shifted this narrative.³⁴ In his account, the Gauls were a spent force, sapped of their old bellicose spirit. The farther a tribe was from Rome, though, the more dangerous it remained.³⁵ His conquests were therefore necessary to

bring a failing but not yet toothless enemy properly to heel. In painting this modified picture of the Gauls, Caesar inverted or complicated some of the standard tropes. Conventional stereotypes called the Gauls brash but feckless, terrifying in the first onslaught but unable to sustain a long fight. Caesar credited his Gaulish enemies with tenacity and frequently referred to their self-possession in the face of danger, a quality Romans called *virtus* and liked to think of as a distinctively Roman trait.³⁶ It was likewise commonplace to blame Gaulish aggression on excessive drinking.³⁷ Caesar reversed this image and declared that exposure to the Roman world and its luxuries, especially wine, had made the Gauls soft. The more dangerous Gauls were those who banned the import of wine, not those who indulged in it.³⁸

Other habits commonly connected with barbarians were human sacrifice and cannibalism.³⁹ Caesar applied these themes to the Gauls but turned them from signs of disorder and moral failure into marks of order and moral strength. He repeated some details of Gaulish human sacrifice (probably cribbed from Poseidonius) but also connected it with the druids. Druids, such as Diviciacus, were already known in Rome and had a reputation as philosophers. Caesar expanded on the idea of druids as learned sages and described the depth and seriousness of their training.⁴⁰ He also presented a {155} speech by a Gaulish leader urging his compatriots in a town under siege to resort to cannibalism when necessary to hold out against the Romans rather than rush off into a battle they could not hope to win. This classic act of barbarism thus became an expedient of *virtus*.⁴¹ Caesar's narrative walked a fine line between conjuring the specter of the old Gaulish menace to give luster to his victory and reassuring a nervous audience that these new additions to Rome's people had the potential to become civilized.

Despite the simplifications of Caesar's account, the peoples he conquered were in reality not a uniform culture. For most, their primary identifiers were tribal and familial.⁴² Many had adopted certain cultural features of the Atlantic and La Tène traditions, such as architectural techniques and metalwork styles, while other habits remained highly localized, such as burial customs and dress.⁴³ Personal, tribal, and place names allow us to trace some linguistic patterns, but many such names were only recorded later and their sources are not always clear. Religious traditions, especially the organization of the druids, may have been shared across tribal lines, but these religious interconnections do not constitute an ethnic identity on their own.⁴⁴ Evidence for an intertribal sense of identity before Caesar's conquest is thin.⁴⁵ Efforts by the local peoples to unify themselves came only late and as a response to Caesar's invasion.⁴⁶

Caesar reworked this diverse range of societies into a picture that, while not uniform, was easy for his audience to grasp. "All of Gaul is divided into three parts," runs the first line of *The Gallic War*, "of which the Belgae inhabit one, the Aquitani another, and the third is held by the people who in their own language call themselves Celts but whom we call Gauls."⁴⁷ In this model {156} there was a definable place called "Gaul" whose people were of only a few different kinds.

Such a place, once defined, could be mapped, conquered, and incorporated into Rome's dominion. The idea of Gauls as a coherent ethnic group inhabiting a place called Gaul is in large part Caesar's invention.⁴⁸

Caesar also invented the Germans, whom he defined as the people who lived east of the Rhine. The origins of the Latin word *Germani* are uncertain. It may derive from a tribal name or a term used by Poseidonius' Gaulish informants for a neighboring people.⁴⁹ Like the people of what Caesar called Gaul, the peoples to whom he applied this name had some broad cultural traits in common, archaeologically identified as the "Jastorf culture." Personal and tribal names recorded by classical authors, as well as runic texts from as early as the first century CE, suggest that many peoples near the Rhine and in Scandinavia spoke early Germanic languages. Nevertheless, they had no unity as an ethnic or political group.⁵⁰ By applying a common name to all the peoples east of the Rhine and ascribing shared traits to them, Caesar invented an ethnicity where there was none.

Having made the Gauls less threatening to his Roman audience, Caesar built up the Germans as the real threat. He applied to them many of the old stereotypes about the Gauls: they were simple people, bold but brutish, lacking in organization and self-control.⁵¹ They were untempered by contact with Rome, a lurking menace on the new frontier to be guarded against.⁵² Roman authors of later generations followed the pattern Caesar had laid down: Gauls were gradually and grudgingly accepted into the Roman fold while the Germans remained a remote and incomprehensible danger. Caesar thus accomplished rhetorically what he had effected on the ground: shifting the boundary between what was inside and what remained outside.

This model of northwestern Europe was useful both to Caesar and to later Romans. For Caesar, it helped rationalize his opportunistic conquests as a worthy accomplishment. Romans no longer had to fear the Gauls beyond their borders. The distant threat of the Germans, however, justified his aggressive actions. For later Romans, the Rhine River was a convenient border line, easily identified and patrolled. Beyond it lay unconquered peoples against whom Rome could lead the fight, just as Rome had led the fight against the Gauls. The terms had shifted, but the formula remained the same: some barbarians were ready to become part of the civilized world, but others had to be subdued by Roman arms.

A Return to *Romanitas*

After nearly a decade in the field, Caesar returned to Rome in 49 BCE flush with plunder and followed by an army of battle-hardened veterans. His return sparked a political crisis in Rome and set off a new round of civil war. The Senate called on Pompey to lead its armies against Caesar. After defeating Pompey's forces in battles ranging across the Mediterranean, Caesar chased Pompey to Egypt, only

to discover that the general had been murdered there on the orders of the young King Ptolemy XIII. Offended by this act, Caesar helped Ptolemy's sister and rival, Cleopatra, oust her brother and take the throne of Egypt for herself, after which Caesar and Cleopatra carried on a romantic relationship that produced an illegitimate son.

Back in Rome, Caesar ruled as dictator from 49 to 44 BCE. With his power backed by loyal soldiers, a vast fortune, and popularity with the people, Caesar was able to enact reforms. He relieved debts, founded new colonies on the sites of Carthage and Corinth, and improved conditions for the poor in Rome. He also regularized relations between Rome and its peoples, doing away with much of the patchwork of unequal statuses that had caused so much tension in the previous century. Caesar's reforms finally addressed many of the inequalities that kept Italy divided, but he had overestimated his ability to force political changes on a recalcitrant aristocracy. A group of senators plotted against Caesar and assassinated him in 44.

The death of Caesar unleashed civil war once again. Two men emerged as the new leaders of the factions: Caesar's companion, Mark Antony, and Caesar's great-nephew and adopted son, Octavian. An uneasy truce divided the Roman world between them. Antony claimed the lucrative East, which had been spared most of the devastation of the civil wars. He based himself in Egypt where Cleopatra allied herself and her considerable resources with him. Before his death, Caesar had been planning an invasion of Parthia to avenge the humiliation of Crassus. Antony intended to take over the plan. Conquering Parthia would be an achievement to rival Caesar's and would give Antony both the reputation and the funds to crush Octavian once and for all. Octavian was left with the West, underdeveloped, depopulated, and exhausted from decades of war.

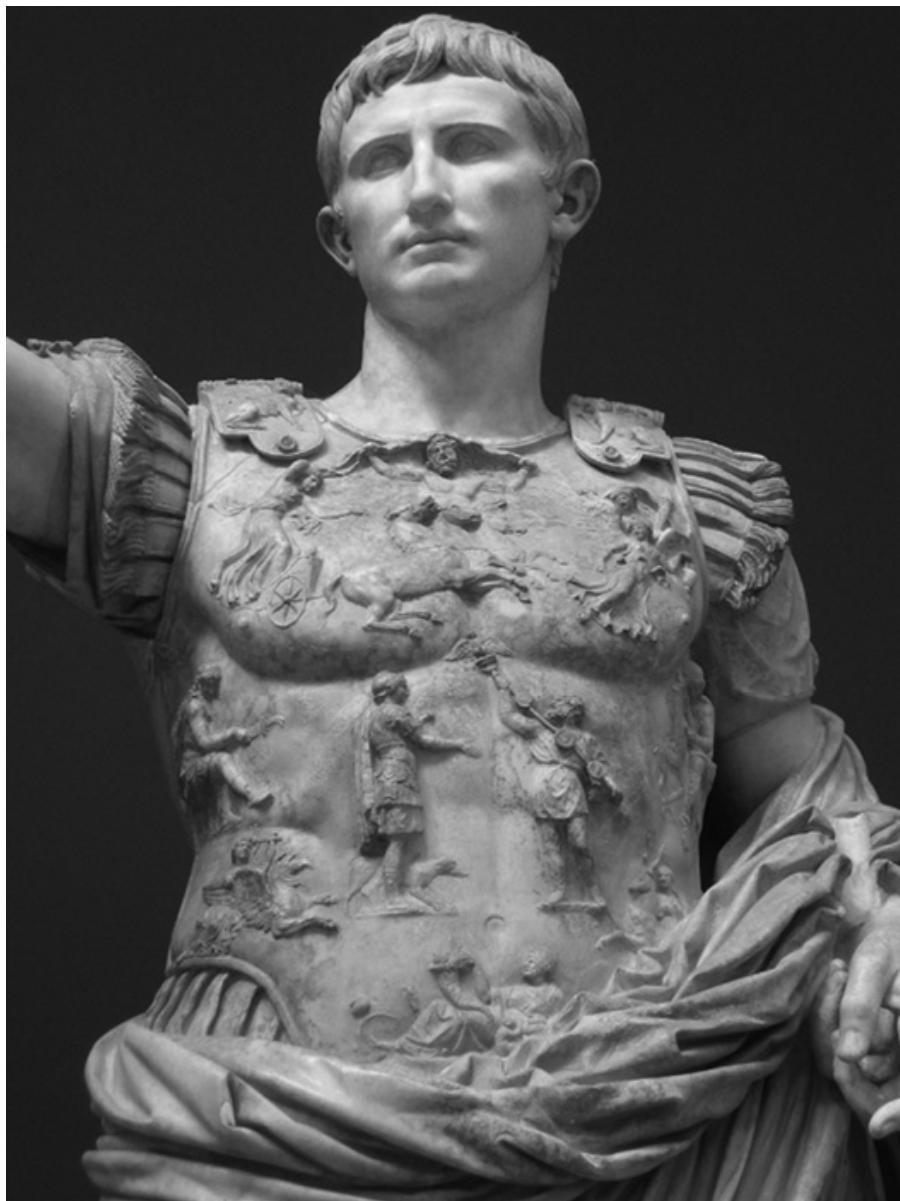
For Romans with a sense of history, the world seemed to have gone topsy-turvy. Romans were supposed to embody patriotic self-restraint and respect for constitutional order, while barbarians were supposed to be violent, disorderly, and tyrannical. Yet there were now Gauls debating in the Senate {158} while Romans were fighting interminable wars to make themselves masters of Rome.⁵³ In such times, what did it even mean to be a Roman? Octavian grasped that the critical contest in this last gasp of civil war would be not who had more troops or fuller coffers but who could better answer that question.

Octavian played the dutiful son, embracing Caesar's populist politics and pouring his efforts into rebuilding Italy. Furthermore, he espoused a vision of *Romanitas*, or Romanness, that was not just for the elite of the city but appealed to common Italian traditions. He cultivated a public image of old-fashioned simplicity, dressing plainly and wearing a farmer's broad-brimmed hat. He was enthusiastic about popular pastimes such as gambling on dice, and he dined on plain Italian food such as figs and coarse bread.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, his propagandists portrayed Antony as un-Roman, corrupted by Eastern luxury and the wiles of Cleopatra. Stories were spread about lavish banquets and lurid sexual escapades in Alexandria, and it was whispered that Antony intended to make Rome a

colony of Egypt. These stories were probably no more true than political mudslinging usually is, but Antony's own propaganda, which drew heavily on Hellenistic and Egyptian models to solidify his support in the East, only helped Octavian's case.⁵⁵

If Antony's Parthian campaign had gone well and he had returned to Rome at the head of a veteran army with overflowing coffers, the people might have rallied to him. But his operations achieved very little at great cost. When the decisive confrontation between Antony and Octavian came, at Actium off the shores of western Greece in 31 BCE, Rome was on Octavian's side. Octavian advertised his victory not as the defeat of Antony but as the conquest of Egypt. Cleopatra was made the villain of the story. Octavian's propaganda attacked her image, portraying her not as the last Macedonian queen of a Hellenistic state, Caesar's consort, and a longtime ally of Rome, but as a wild, dangerous Egyptian monster who, in drunken madness, worshiped bizarre dog-headed gods.⁵⁶

Octavian, now known by the name granted to him by the Senate, "Augustus" (revered one), negotiated a settlement with Parthia. Parthia's territorial claims in Mesopotamia were secured, and several Parthian princes were received at Rome, away from dynastic intrigue. In return, Parthia handed over Crassus' standards, returned the prisoners from Crassus' campaign, and {159} recognized Roman influence in Armenia.⁵⁷ Parthia and Rome, two military giants, settled into a wary peace that few wished to upset. Augustus and most of his successors avoided open confrontation with Parthia, confining their aggressions to contests over influence in Armenia and other border kingdoms. True to form, Augustus celebrated this diplomatic resolution as if it were {160} a military victory, presenting the princes as hostages and commissioning a statue of himself in a general's garb on which he received the standards from a submitting Parthian. He even had a triumphal arch erected in the Forum to commemorate the event.⁵⁸



{159} Detail of a marble statue of the emperor Augustus, first century BCE (probably a copy of an original statue, which may have been made in bronze, now lost), currently in the Vatican Museums, Rome. This statue represents Augustus' diplomatic accomplishments in the East as if they were military victories. Augustus is depicted in military garb, and his breastplate is decorated with an image of himself receiving Crassus' lost standards from a surrendering Parthian, surrounded by mythological images of the earth and heavens, implying that Augustus' "victory" had restored order not only to the human world but on a cosmic scale as well.

Still, however artfully Augustus spun these achievements, they were no substitute for the true pinnacle of traditional Roman accomplishment: expanding the bounds of the empire. A glorious foreign conquest would cement his status as the paragon of restored *Romanitas*, and he set about to find one. Rome's northern

frontier stretched from Macedonia along the rugged coast of Illyria, over the northern slopes of the Alps, and down the Rhine River. Throughout this region Rome had clients and allies whose local troubles would readily furnish the pretexts for new wars. Under Augustus' authority, new campaigns pushed this border forward, reaching the Danube and Elbe Rivers.⁵⁹ Not all of Augustus' conquests endured, and his successors in the Julio-Claudian dynasty, which lasted until 68 CE, mostly avoided further expansion, focusing instead on securing and organizing the vast territory now under Roman rule. The exception was Claudius, who came to power unexpectedly with very little previous experience in public affairs. To prove his worth as an emperor, he initiated the conquest of Britain in 43 CE.

Managing this empire was a challenge for a state still struggling to update the machinery of its government from that of a city-state to that of a world empire. Monarchic power allowed for reforms that had been impossible in the century of civil strife, but imperial administration remained experimental throughout the Julio-Claudian age. One old tradition that had to go was the patronage of foreign peoples by the Roman aristocracy. The emperors could not allow competition in the field of foreign policy or let themselves be circumvented like Tiberius Gracchus had done to the Senate with the wealth of Pergamon. Augustus diluted the power of old aristocratic families both by drawing a broader Italian elite into the Senate and by going outside the Senate for some of his administrative appointments. The singularly wealthy province of Egypt was kept as a de facto private possession of the emperors, which men of high standing in Rome were not welcome even to visit without permission.⁶⁰

In place of the old aristocratic patronage networks, the emperors became patrons-in-chief to the whole empire, but their patronage operated at a distance and without the personal links to individual communities and families that had sustained republican relationships. New structures, both practical {161} and ideological, were needed to hold the diverse peoples of Rome's empire together. Augustus' embrace of traditional Romanness served him well among those who thought of themselves (or wished to be thought of) as Romans, but many of the people under his rule did not. In the East, emperors followed Hellenistic precedents and projected a Greek identity. Throughout the empire, they encouraged the worship of the imperial family. Local aristocrats who showed loyalty to Rome were trusted to administer their own cities, tribes, and territories under the supervision of Roman governors. Through these and other ways of forging connections with the people under their rule, the Julio-Claudians groped their way toward a cohesive empire.

Living with Rome

By the end of Augustus' reign, the divisions that had plagued the late Republic seemed largely healed. The peoples of Italy now enjoyed Roman citizenship and a

more equitable sharing of burdens and benefits. Factional strife had been suppressed. The worst sufferings of the poor had been relieved through the founding of colonies in the provinces and charity for those who remained in the city. The rich were secure in their estates and could still compete with each other for status and prestige, if not for much actual power. Not everyone was content, and new conflicts were slowly brewing, but for the time being there was peace, prosperity, and stability. From the vantage point of Rome, it appeared that the problem of insiders and outsiders was finally resolved. Like many imperial states, however, Rome had only solved its problems at home by exporting them to the rest of the empire. The people of Rome's provinces now had to deal with the question of what it meant to be subjects of the new imperial power.

The western parts of the empire had longer experience with Rome. Southern Gaul and the Mediterranean coast of Spain were accustomed to Roman leadership. Native aristocrats there continued to manage local affairs, and some gradually climbed into the higher ranks of administration. Both western Spain and northern Gaul had been brought under Roman rule more recently and traumatically. Even in these regions, though, after a few generations, local leaders were rising into Roman society.⁶¹ Carthage was resettled, and the rest of North Africa was gradually brought into the empire, first as client kingdoms and later as provinces. Members of the local elite there, too, began to advance in the imperial world.

In the East, Rome was a relative newcomer, but previous empires and the Hellenistic kingdoms had established power structures that were easy for {162} Rome to take over. Rome came east in Hellenic guise, adopting Greek rather than Latin as the language of government and retaining much of the administrative structure of the Hellenistic kingdoms. The embrace of Hellenism opened opportunities for those who counted themselves among the Greeks, but, as under the Macedonian dynasties, the use of Greek culture coexisted with non-Greek traditions, languages, and social structures.⁶²

The imperial cult was another vehicle through which provincials negotiated their relationship with Rome. While the emperors encouraged the worship of the imperial family, the traditions that developed in the provinces were largely local creations. In most places, the imperial cult was added to local traditions and interpreted in their light, rather than replacing them. In North Africa, for example, the emperors were worshiped alongside the Carthaginian god Ba'al by priests who called themselves both by the Latin term *flamen* and the Latinized Punic *sufes*.⁶³ Greek cities developed their own local variations on the imperial cult, often singling out particular members of the imperial family as local favorites, such as Tiberius in Aetolia and Germanicus in Athens.⁶⁴ Augustus refused the formal trappings of kingship in Egypt, but Egyptian priests honored him in accordance with the traditions of pharaonic divinity.⁶⁵ Other outward displays of Romanness, such as the portrayal of emperors and imperial symbols on provincial coinage and the adoption of Roman architectural forms for new public buildings, were also driven by local initiative.⁶⁶

The adoption of Roman cultural markers in the provinces in the early generations of the empire served crucial needs. Provincials hoped that Roman administrators would deal more fairly with people who presented familiar cultural habits and publicly proclaimed their loyalty to Rome. On a deeper level, laying claim to Romanness was a way of projecting a favorable attitude to Rome. The imperial monarchy was still a new institution, but the privileges of being insiders were plain to those who lived as outsiders. By {163} presenting themselves in Roman ways, provincials used the means available to them to begin making the case that they could be insiders, too.

The spread of Roman power was not without problems. Many of these were provoked or exacerbated by the ham-fisted administration of the provinces by distant emperors and inept governors lacking the local knowledge that the aristocratic patronage networks had provided.⁶⁷ The planting of Roman colonies in conquered provinces created the same land pressures there that they alleviated in Italy. Exposure to citizens in these colonies also brought provincials face to face with the inequalities of legal rights, taxation, and opportunities between citizens and noncitizens. Taxation and administrative corruption remained perpetual irritants in provincial society, occasionally leading to revolt.⁶⁸ One such revolt occurred in Gaul in 21 CE. The rebels complained of oppressive maladministration by the provincial governor and rallied fighters to their cause with a call for freedom. Like the Italians in the Social War who rallied to the same cause, the Gauls were now caught between insider and outsider status, bearing the burdens of the Roman state without enjoying its full benefits.⁶⁹ Other uprisings were similarly sparked by Rome's failure to grasp local sentiment, such as the revolt of the Germans under Arminius in 9 CE, or the British revolt led by Boudica in 60 CE, both of which drew on widespread anger and caught Roman forces by surprise.

In the East, too, even though the Roman embrace of Hellenism drew on established traditions, it was applied with a lack of sensitivity to local cultures that widened rifts between those who considered themselves Greek and those who did not. The Jews were especially affected. A decree concerning the administration of justice in Cyrene, for instance, guaranteed fair treatment for Greeks without mention of others in the province, notably the substantial Jewish population.⁷⁰

Jewish communities in Hellenic cities around the eastern Mediterranean petitioned Rome for protection against attacks on their safety and traditions by their Greek neighbors. Rome responded with directives to individual cities to halt the abuses, but the piecemeal nature of these responses suggests that Rome was slow to recognize the problem and ineffective in its response.⁷¹ The expectation that provincials would participate in emperor worship was {164} another ongoing source of tension. Accommodations approved by earlier emperors were not respected by later ones, despite Jewish efforts at negotiating a lasting compromise.⁷²

In 38 CE the Greek-identifying population of Alexandria, emboldened by the

pro-Greek policies of the governor Flaccus, broke out in violent anti-Jewish rioting. Philo, a contemporary Jewish witness, recalled the conflict as an explicit challenge to the Jews' place in the empire:

we were cut off from those things that anchor our lives: the customs of our fathers, our participation in political rights. . . . [Flaccus] issued a proclamation calling us foreigners and strangers and, without allowing any response, condemned us without trial.⁷³

Flaccus was eventually removed and disciplined, but Roman-Jewish relations remained troubled.⁷⁴

While Jewish communities elsewhere in the Mediterranean tended to hang together, in the way of immigrant communities everywhere, in Judaea the strain of Roman rule exacerbated internal divisions. Some adapted to Rome by publicly displaying markers of Hellenic identity. Others rejected Rome and embraced one of several Jewish revivalist sects. A variety of wandering preachers, healers, and miracle workers inspired popular religiosity. Although most of these movements were not direct responses to Roman power, the pressure of the empire and the tension between Jewish identity and adherence to Rome created fertile ground for the emergence of new identities and new ways of expressing old ones.

Augustus had chosen Romanness as the banner around which to rally his empire. In some places, the espousal of Roman culture became a useful tool for provincial peoples in their pursuit of greater security, status, and opportunities under the empire's dominion. In other places, the promotion of Romanness brought underlying tensions to the surface. As the Julio-Claudians struggled to figure out how to rule an empire full of barbarians, the barbarians struggled to figure out how to live with the empire.

The Emperor's Things

As the chaos of the Republic's last century faded and the first imperial dynasty stumbled toward political stability, many people living under Rome's imperial {165} rule were caught in an uncertain status, neither entirely Roman nor entirely non-Roman. The conflicts that arose out of this uncertainty often played out at the local level, but their implications were empire-wide.



A coin of the emperor Tiberius (ruled 14–37 CE), the emperor whose coins were probably at issue in the discussion over paying taxes in early first-century Judaea.

One day in the early first century CE, some members of one Jewish movement approached the leader of another movement and put a question to him: was it lawful for the Jews to pay taxes to Rome? This was, of course, a trap. If he said yes, he would alienate his followers, who resented Rome's taxes. If he said no, he could be turned in to the Roman authorities as a rebel. Like many colonized peoples, Jewish factions were using the power of the colonizer as a tool in their own internal conflicts. The leader chose a third option. Pointing out that the coin was stamped with the emperor's likeness, he replied: "Give the emperor's things to the emperor and God's things to God."⁷⁵

This leader was Yeshua, known in Greek sources as Iesos and in Latin as Jesus. It is unlikely that he knew of Virgil's *Aeneid*, published only a generation before, but he caught the same ambivalence about Rome's empire. Virgil had posited two types of barbarians: those who were accepted as part of the Roman world and those who had to be subdued by Roman arms. In a growing empire, however, many peoples were caught in between. The road from conquest to integration was not a smooth one. In Italy, where there was a shared history and long-standing connections, it had taken a century of civil war to finally bridge the gap between insiders and outsiders. Now Rome's territory included an enormous diversity of peoples who had little in common except that they all faced the same problem of how to live in a world ruled by Rome. As Jesus aptly pointed out, his people were caught in the middle, in the empire but not of it. They were not the

emperor's things, but the emperor's things were all around them, and their lives were entangled with Rome in ways no one could escape.

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1. Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.278–79.
 2. *Ibid.*, 6.851–53.
 3. Ovid, *Fasti* 2.683–84.
 4. Cicero, *Republic* 3.24. Cf. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, “The Deified Augustus,” 31.5.
 5. Badian, *Foreign Clientelae*; Cristina Rosillo-López, “Reconsidering Foreign Clientelae as a Source of Status in the City of Rome during the Late Roman Republic,” in *Foreign Clientelae in the Roman Empire: A Reconsideration*, ed. Martin Jehne and Francisco Pina Polo (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015), 263–80.
 6. Anthony J. Marshall, “Friends of the Roman People,” *American Journal of Philology* 89, no. 1 (January 1968): 39–55.
 7. No doubt Attalus saw that a Roman takeover of Pergamon was inevitable, and he hoped to get better terms by taking the initiative himself. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Life of Tiberius Gracchus” 14.
 8. On the politics of this period see Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Life of Tiberius Gracchus,” “Life of Gaius Gracchus”; Appian, *Civil War* 1.
 9. Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History* 2.16; Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 37.2.
 10. Edward T. Salmon, “The Cause of the Social War,” *Phoenix* 16, no. 2 (1962): 107–19. On bull symbolism see Jennifer E. Thomas, “Lucan’s Bulls: A Problematic Simile at *Bellum Civile* 2.601–9,” *Classical Journal* 105, no. 2 (December 2009): 153–62.
 11. Appian, *Civil War* 1.53.
 12. Velleius Paterculus 2.20.
 13. Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 34.2.
 14. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Life of Crassus” 9; Appian, *Civil War* 1.116–21.
 15. Cicero, *Against Catiline*; Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline*.
 16. William V. Harris, *Rome in Etruria and Umbria* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 290–93.
 17. Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 68–104; Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 10–30. Note how Cicero works to present his ally Pompey’s activities against slave rebels and pirates as if they were foreign wars. See Cicero, *On the Manilian Law*.
 18. Brosius, *Persians*, 83–95.
 19. Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* 3.75; Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Life of Lucullus” 36.5–6; Appian, *Mithridatic Wars* 84.
 20. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Life of Crassus” 23–27; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 40.21–24.
 21. Dyson, *Roman Frontier*, 132–37.
 22. Cicero, *On Divination* 1.90; Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.11.
 23. Cicero, *Against Catiline* 3.6; Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline* 45.
 24. Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.10.
 25. Christian Godineau, *César et la Gaule* (Paris: Errance, 1990), 308–15; Wolfgang Will, *Julius Caesar: eine Bilanz* (Stuttgart: W. Kolhammer, 1992), 96–104.
 26. Charles Ebel, “Southern Gaul in the Triumviral Period: A Critical Stage of Romanization,” *American Journal of Philology* 109, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 572–90.
 27. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, “Life of Caesar” 22.3; Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, “The Deified Julius” 24.3. On the Roman concept of the “just war” and its adaptability to circumstance, see Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 166–75.
 28. See, for instance, how Cicero had played on traditional Roman fears of the Gauls during the Catilinarian crisis in the previous decade. Cicero, *Against Catiline* 3.22.

29. For a typical example, see C. K. "Professor Sage on the Teaching of Caesar," *Classical Weekly* 16, no. 27 (May 21, 1923): 215.
30. Courtenay E. Stevens, "The 'Bellum Gallicum' as a Work of Propaganda," *Latomus* 11, no. 1 (January–March 1952): 2–18; Kathryn Welch and Anton Powell, eds., *Julius Caesar as Artful Reporter: The War Commentaries as Political Instruments* (London: Duckworth, 1998).
31. Poseidonius' account does not survive intact but is known from fragments and quotations in other authors. See Felix Jacoby, *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, vol. 2A (Berlin: Weidmann, 1926); Philip Freeman, *The Philosopher and the Druids* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).
32. Athenaeus (citing Poseidonius), *Deipnosophistae* 4.36–37, 40, 6.49.
33. Strabo, *Geography* 4.4.5.
34. Andrew M. Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).
35. Hester Schadee, "Caesar's Construction of Northern Europe: Inquiry, Contact and Corruption in 'De Bello Gallico'," *Classical Quarterly*, n.s., 58, no. 1 (May 2008): 158–80.
36. Caesar, *Gallie War* 1.1, 1.13, 2.4, 2.15, 2.27, 2.33, 5.34, 7.77, 7.80. See Riggsby, *Caesar*, 83–96.
37. Plato, *Laws* 1.637d–e; Diodorus of Sicily 5.26; Athenaeus (citing Poseidonius) 4.36; Ammianus Marcellinus (citing Cato and Cicero), *Res Gestae* 15.12.4. Cf. Polyaeus, *Stratagemes* 7.25; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 2.2h.
38. Caesar, *Gallie War* 1.1, 2.15, 4.2.
39. Diodorus of Sicily 5.4.31; Strabo 4.4.5; Keyser, "Greek Geography," 47.
40. Caesar, *Gallie War* 6.13–14.
41. *Ibid.*, 7.77–78.
42. Carroll, *Romans, Celts and Germans*, 112–15.
43. Tina Thurston, "Unity and Diversity in the European Iron Age: Out of the Mists, Some Clarity?" *Journal of Archaeological Research* 17, no. 4 (December 2009): 347–423; Ursula Rothe, "The 'Third Way': Treveran Women's Dress and the 'Gallic Ensemble,'" *American Journal of Archaeology* 16, no. 2 (April 2012): 235–52.
44. Caesar, *Gallie War* 6.13–14; Pomponius Mela, *Chorographia* 3.19; Jane Webster, "At the End of the World: Druidic and Other Revitalization Movements in Post-Conquest Gaul and Britain," *Britannia* 30 (1999). Compare, for example, how oracles such as Delphi and Siwa attracted a multicultural range of supplicants. See Philip Kaplan, "Dedications to Greek Sanctuaries by Foreign Kings in the Eighth through Sixth Centuries BCE," *Historia* 55, no. 2 (2006): 129–52; Pauline Ripat, "The Language of Oracular Inquiry in Roman Egypt," *Phoenix* 60, nos. 3/4 (Fall–Winter 2006): 304–28.
45. What little evidence there is for a pre-Caesarian pan-Gaulish identity has often been exaggerated to serve the needs of modern nationalism. See Michael Dietler, "'Our Ancestors the Gauls': Archaeology, Ethnic Nationalism, and the Manipulation of Celtic Identity in Modern Europe," *American Anthropologist*, n.s., 96, no. 3 (September 1994): 584–605.
46. Caesar, *Gallie War* 7.1–4.
47. *Ibid.*, 1.1.
48. Josiah Osgood, "The Pen and the Sword: Writing and Conquest in Caesar's Gaul," *Classical Antiquity* 28, no. 2 (October 2009): 328–58. See also Sara H. Lindheim, "Pomona's *Pomarium*: The 'Mapping Impulse' in *Metamorphoses* 14 (and 9)," *Transactions of the American Philological Society* (1974–) 140, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 163–94.
49. Poseidonius, cited in Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 4.39.
50. Marie Stoklund, "The First Runes—the Literary Language of the Germani," in *The Spoils of Victory: The North in the Shadow of the Roman Empire*, ed. Lars Jørgensen, Birger Storgaard, and Lone Gebauer Thomsen (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 2003), 172–78; Malcolm Todd, *The Early Germans*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 8–14.
51. Caesar, *Gallie War* 6.21–24.
52. Jane F. Gardner, "The 'Gallic Menace' in Caesar's Propaganda," *Greece and Rome* 30, no. 2 (October 1983): 181–89.

53. Caesar had admitted Cisalpine Gauls to the Senate. Roman popular opinion did not distinguish between Cisalpine Gauls, who had been under Roman rule since the second century BCE, and the newly conquered Transalpine Gauls, as demonstrated by a bit of doggerel current at the time: "Caesar led the Gauls in triumph—right into the Senate house!" Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, "The Deified Julius" 76, 80.
54. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, "The Deified Augustus" 71, 76, 83.
55. Diana E. E. Kleiner and Bridget Buxton, "Pledges of Empire: The Ara Pacis and the Donations of Rome," *American Journal of Archaeology* 112, no. 1 (January 2008): 57–89.
56. Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.696–700; Horace, *Odes* 1.37.
57. Brosius, *Persians*, 96–97.
58. Horace, *Odes* 4.15; Augustus, *Res Gestae* 29; Velleius Paterculus 2.91; Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, "The Deified Augustus" 21; Charles Brian Rose, "The Parthians in Augustan Rome," *American Journal of Archaeology* 109, no. 1 (January 2005): 21–75.
59. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, "The Deified Augustus" 21.
60. Peter A. Brunt, "Princeps and Equites," *Journal of Roman Studies* 73 (1983): 42–75; Gregory S. Dundas, "Augustus and the Kingship of Egypt," *Historia* 51, no. 4 (2002): 433–48.
61. Tacitus, *Annals* 11.25; Leonard A. Churchin, *The Local Magistrates of Roman Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).
62. Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East: 31 B.C.–A.D. 337* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Ball offers a valuable critique of Millar, but see also discussion of the problems in Ball's scholarship: Warwick Ball, *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire* (London: Routledge, 1999); Michael Whitby, "Ex Oriente Lux?" *Classical Review*, n.s., 51, no. 2 (2001): 341–42; C. S. Lightfoot, "Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire by Warwick Ball," *International History Review* 24, no. 2 (2002): 381–84.
63. James B. Rives, "Imperial Cult and Native Tradition in North Africa," *Classical Journal* 96, no. 4 (April–May 2001): 425–36.
64. Fernando Lozano, "*Divi Augusti* and *Theoi Sebastoi*: Roman Initiatives and Greek Answers," *Classical Quarterly*, n.s., 57, no. 1 (May 2007): 139–52.
65. Dundas, "Augustus."
66. Martin Millett, *The Romanization of Britain: An Essay in Archaeological Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 104–26; Andrew Burnett, "The Augustan Revolution Seen from the Mints of the Provinces," *Journal of Roman Studies* 101 (2011): 1–30.
67. Millar's observations on the limits of Roman foreign policy are applicable: Fergus Millar, "Emperors, Frontiers, and Foreign Relations, 31 B.C. to A.D. 378," *Britannia* 13 (1982): 1–23.
68. Barbara Levick, "Pliny in Bithynia—and What Followed," *Greece and Rome* 26, no. 2 (October 1979): 119–31.
69. A. J. Christopherson, "The Provincial Assembly of the Three Gauls in the Julio-Claudian Period," *Historia* 17, no. 3 (July 1968): 351–66.
70. *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 9.8. Note Josephus (citing Strabo), *Antiquities of the Jews* 14.115.
71. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 14.190–264, 16.162–73, 19.278–91, 19.299–311, 20.1–14.
72. Philo of Alexandria, *On the Embassy to Gaius*.
73. Philo of Alexandria, *Against Flaccus* 53–54.
74. Richard Alston, "Philo's *In Flaccum*: Ethnicity and Social Space in Roman Alexandria," *Greece and Rome* 44, no. 2 (October 1997): 165–75; Pieter W. van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus: The First Pogrom* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
75. Matthew 22:15–21; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–25.

{167} CHAPTER 9

GREEK, ROMAN, AND GRECO-ROMAN

In 191 BCE a delegation from Rome arrived in Athens. Since 214, Rome had been extending its power eastward in a series of wars against the Antigonid kings of Macedonia. Greeks and Romans had not always had good relations, but the Antigonids were a common enemy, and Roman victories over them were well received in Greece. The weakening of Macedonia, however, allowed the Seleucid kingdom in Asia to expand its reach into the Aegean. Athens and other cities in Greece were unsure whether to court the Romans or make terms with the Seleucids. The Romans' mission in 191 was to persuade the Greeks to side with Rome.

The leader of this mission was a man noted for his lack of diplomatic tact: Cato the Elder. Cato was blunt, snappish, and cantankerous. According to a popular joke, when he died, his spirit would be kicked out of the afterlife because his orneriness would try even the patience of the dead.¹ When he addressed the Athenians, although he could speak Greek, he chose instead to use Latin and have his words translated. As he later recalled, the Athenians were astonished at how long it took the interpreter to render his curt Latin sentences into Greek. We have no Greek record of the event to compare with Cato's memory, so it is hard to judge how impressed the Athenians actually were, but they chose to side with the Romans.²

Two centuries later, another Roman leader dealt with the cultural divide differently. In 14 CE the emperor Augustus, old and in declining health, took a pleasure cruise along the Italian coast. On the isle of Capri he encountered a ship from Alexandria whose Greek passengers greeted him with great courtesy, so he invited them to join his entourage for a few days of leisure. For his amusement, Augustus handed out Roman togas to the Greeks and ordered them to speak Latin, while he gave Greek *pallia* (cloaks) to the Romans in his retinue and commanded them to speak Greek. Among the festivities, Augustus improvised some lines of poetry in Greek and jokingly asked his companions to guess which famous author wrote them. He also referred to {168} another island where his followers were relaxing as "Apragopolis," Greek for "Do-Nothing City."³

These two incidents offer different views of the interaction between Greeks and Romans. Cato's brusque message to the Athenians was a display of Roman power. The Athenians might have expected that a Roman who wanted their

friendship would follow the example of Titus Quinctius Flaminius, a Roman commander who had been instrumental in the defeat of Macedonia only a few years before and had been much admired in Greece for his embrace of Greek culture. Instead, Cato emphasized the differences. His terse sentences showed that the Romans were a people of action, not words. Greek was a fine language for making pretty speeches, but Latin was a language for getting things done. Augustus' good-natured mischief, on the other hand, erased the differences between Romans and Greeks. He assumed that Greeks could speak Latin and Romans Greek, that the clothes of either were suitable to the other, and that both could enjoy themselves at his table.

Beneath the surface, though, there is more to both of these incidents than first appears. However proudly Cato spoke Latin in Athens, Greek was still the language of power politics in the eastern Mediterranean, as it would continue to be under Rome's expanding authority. The Romans were still newcomers, and they were competing for the good will of Greeks who were often inclined to dismiss them as barbarian upstarts. By Augustus' day, the balance of power had shifted, but there was still an uneasiness in the relationship between Romans and Greeks. The exchange of clothes and language was also an exercise of Roman power. Augustus' witticisms proved that he was a master of Greek culture and language as much as he was politically the master of the Greek world. The pallia that Augustus distributed to his Roman followers were not, in fact, typical Greek clothes but rather what Romans imagined that Greeks wore—the equivalent of an American dressing up as “French” by donning a striped shirt and beret.⁴ The Greek guests had little choice but to tolerate all of this with good humor. Who were they to refuse the whims of the man who held the power of life and death over them all? Augustus' revels were as culturally charged as Cato's speech: once again, a Roman used the differences between their cultures to remind the Greeks of Rome's power.

Over the centuries of their interactions, Greeks and Romans often returned to the themes of culture and power. Greek civilization enjoyed a position of cultural prestige even under Rome's empire. The relationships between the two were subject to negotiation and reinterpretation. Some Greeks found the Romans to be brutish barbarians while others saw in them a worthy counterpart to their own civilization. Some Romans admired and emulated {169} Greek culture while others despised it. Most found themselves somewhere in between—even Cato could speak Greek.

Because of the preservation of Greek and Roman literature and art by later cultures, we know more about how Romans and Greeks thought about one another than any other cross-cultural relationship in the ancient Mediterranean. The many different ways in which Greeks and Romans tried to come to terms with one another suggest some of the complexity that must have also run through less well documented cultural interactions. At the same time, relations between Greeks and Romans were shaped by unique historical circumstances and responded to specific social and political pressures.

A History of Interaction

The earliest contacts between Greeks and Romans probably happened in the late eighth or early seventh centuries BCE, when Greeks were beginning to trade and settle in the western Mediterranean and Rome was taking shape as a city-state. While there may have been direct contact between Romans and Greeks in these early days, most of Rome's early exposure to Greek culture was indirect, by way of the Etruscan cities with whom the Greeks traded.⁵ Over the following centuries, Rome received Greek influences from two main sources: the Etruscan cities in northern Italy and the Greek colonies in southern Italy and Sicily.⁶

Rome's victory over Tarentum and King Pyrrhus of Epirus in 275 marked the arrival of Rome as a power on the Mediterranean stage just as the Wars of Succession were drawing to a close in the East and the Hellenistic kingdoms were settling into a stable diplomatic order. The Ptolemies in Egypt extended friendly relations to the Romans, as did Hiero, the tyrant of Syracuse who controlled much of Greek-colonized eastern Sicily.⁷ As a center of wealth and power, like the courts of Egypt and Persia in previous centuries, Rome attracted Greek professionals. Physicians, artisans, and teachers of rhetoric and philosophy, among other such specialists, sought the patronage of the city's elite. They found a mixed reception. The first Greek physician in Rome, Archagathus, was welcomed in 219 with a grant of Roman citizenship and an office provided at public expense, but his cutting-edge surgical techniques alarmed traditionalist Romans, who gave him the nickname *Carnifex*, "the executioner."⁸ In the second and early first centuries BCE, conservative {170} politicians issued edicts banning Greek philosophers, teachers, and actors from the city, although the frequency with which these bans were repeated suggests that they were less than effective.⁹

During the Second Punic War in the last two decades of the third century, many of the Greek cities of Italy revolted against Rome and sided with Hannibal. The Roman reconquest of some of the rebelling cities was brutal, especially Tarentum and Syracuse, where much of the population was massacred or enslaved.¹⁰ Over the next two centuries, as Roman power expanded, Romans repeatedly inserted themselves into the affairs of the Greek and Macedonian states of the eastern Mediterranean. In their early operations in mainland Greece, the Romans presented themselves as champions of the Greeks, but volatile city-state politics and pressure from other Hellenistic kingdoms continued to destabilize the region.¹¹ Roman interventions in Greece became increasingly harsh over the first half of the second century until in 146 Rome annexed Greece and Macedonia as provinces of the empire.¹²

Rome's expansion proceeded eastward into the territories of the Attalid, Seleucid, and Ptolemaic kingdoms. Roman relations with the Seleucids were generally hostile, mostly because the Seleucid kingdom, the largest and most powerful of the Successor kingdoms, was the greatest threat to Roman ambitions. Rome's relations with other peoples in the eastern Mediterranean, including the Attalids, Ptolemies, Jews, and influential Greek cities such as Rhodes, largely

revolved around the need for local allies against the Seleucids.¹³ In the end, even Attalid Pergamon and Ptolemaic Egypt, two of Rome's staunchest allies, were absorbed into the empire.

Three centuries of periodic warfare against Greek cities and Hellenistic kingdoms brought large numbers of captive Greeks to Rome as slaves. Some of these slaves were educated specialists who turned their skills to profit: the naturalist Pliny the Elder mentioned a playwright, an astronomer, and a grammarian who all arrived in Rome as captives aboard the same ship.¹⁴ Most of these slaves, however, were ordinary laborers and farmhands. The Roman tradition of freeing slaves after a period of service and incorporating them into the citizen body meant that many of these Greeks and their descendants became part of the fabric of Roman society and tended to assimilate into Roman culture.¹⁵

{171} The effects of conquest and the spillover from the internal problems of the late Republic were devastating to many parts of the Greek world.¹⁶ The political stability brought by Augustus' imperial monarchy allowed the Greek world to flourish again. In the first few centuries CE, both Greeks in Rome and Greek communities under Roman rule enjoyed a new level of acceptance and prestige. In the East, the Romans preserved the basic structures of Hellenistic administration. In the western empire, Latin gradually supplanted Greek as the language of daily life in the Greek cities of southern Italy and Sicily, but elements of Greek culture persisted there and even saw a revival in the first century CE.¹⁷

A literary and scholarly movement known as the Second Sophistic reestablished Greece as a center of education and cultural achievement between the late first and early third centuries CE.¹⁸ Several emperors of the early second century took a particular interest in Greece, including Hadrian, who founded the Panhellenium, a religious association of cities with Greek heritage. Although such honors brought few material benefits, the prestige and imperial favor that came with them were valuable. Many cities founded by the Hellenistic monarchs sought to burnish their Greek credentials in order to compete for recognition.¹⁹ While the social cachet attached to Greek culture created opportunities for individuals and communities to improve their standing in the empire, anti-Greek prejudices never entirely died out in Rome, nor were Greeks always at ease with their Roman rulers.

Greek Attitudes toward Romans

Few other conquered peoples in ancient history have left us as rich a record of their opinions on their conquerors as the Greeks did on the Romans. These opinions reflect a wide range of responses both to the traumas of conquest and to the difficulties and opportunities created by their interactions before and after. As with the Macedonians, Greek attitudes toward the Romans were often expressed in terms of identity. The crucial question was which category the Romans

belonged in: Greeks or barbarians? By the third century BCE, these terms had definite moral implications, even if they could still be argued on grounds of ancestry, language, and ways of life. Greeks who called the {172} Romans kin implicitly included them among the ranks of civilized peoples, while those who labeled them barbarians associated them with violence, injustice, and other moral failings.²⁰

The earliest Greek opinions on the Romans are hard to reconstruct. Some Greek authors are believed to have written about Rome as early as the late fifth century BCE, but none of their work survives. A student of Plato in the fourth century identified Rome as a Greek city, but his knowledge of the region was vague.²¹ The first author whose thoughts on Rome we have any meaningful knowledge of is Timaeus, a Sicilian Greek historian who worked in the first half of the third century. While only fragments of his writings survive today, many other ancient authors used his work as a source. It is difficult to distinguish Timaeus' own feelings about Rome from the opinions of those who referenced his work, but since he appears to have been in favor with later Roman writers, his attitude was probably not a negative one.²² In the 220s, after Roman armies had dealt with Illyrian pirates and their queen Teuta, whose marauding had threatened Greek shipping, Roman envoys were enthusiastically received in Athens and Corinth and were granted the honor of participating in the Isthmian Games.²³ It was at the Isthmian Games, in 196, that Flaminius issued the declaration of Greek freedom. Some Greek cities revered him along with the gods in their gratitude.²⁴

The earliest Greek literature dealing with the Romans that survives intact comes from the lyric poet Melinno, who lived in southern Italy in the second century. Melinno composed a hymn in which she addressed Rome as a warrior goddess:

Hail, Rome, daughter of Ares,
golden-belted warlike queen,
you whose earthly home is Olympus
the eternally unshattered.

Ancient Fate gave to you alone
the unbroken glory of royal command,
so that the strength to rule
is in your hands.
{173} Under your strong-strapped yoke
the chests of the earth and the gray sea
are harnessed. You safely steer
the cities of the people.

And though mighty time strikes down all things
and reshapes life into many different forms,

for you alone the wind that blows to the uttermost ends of power
does not shift.

For indeed you bear the strongest
great warriors of all,
just like the bountiful crop yielded
by Demeter's fields.²⁵

Melinno's poem put Rome into a Greek mythic context, evoking the Amazons and Olympian gods such as Ares, god of war, and Demeter, goddess of agriculture. Her imagery—a yoked team, a sailing ship, a fertile field that grows warriors—played on classic tropes of Greek literature dating back to Homer and Hesiod.²⁶

Melinno lived a generation or two removed from the brutalities of Roman conquest in Italy. Her contemporary, the historian Polybius, had a more vexed relationship to Rome. Polybius and other Greek political leaders were hostages in Rome for nearly two decades in the mid-second century. He returned to Greece after the destruction of Corinth in 146 and played a role in organizing the Roman administration there.

Polybius' history of the rise of the Roman Republic to Mediterranean dominance conveys an ambivalence about Rome. On one hand, he praised the stability, efficiency, and good order of Rome's government and army.²⁷ His discussion of the Roman Republic placed it in a tradition of Greek political theory stretching back to Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle.²⁸ At the same time, while never explicitly calling the Romans barbarians, he also pointed to troubling aspects of their culture.²⁹ The one that troubled him the most was their viciousness in war. He noted how Roman soldiers {174} ruthlessly slaughtered everything that came in their path, even animals, and declared that "In general, the Romans use force for every purpose."³⁰ He also included several speeches in which Greeks described the Romans as menacing barbarians.³¹ As was the custom among historians in antiquity, Polybius did not claim to have recorded the actual words of the speakers involved, but to have expressed in his own words what he believed was their intent. By repeatedly using the language of barbarism in these speeches, Polybius set up a contrast with his own portrayal of the Romans that makes it difficult to describe him as either pro- or anti-Roman.

The last two centuries BCE saw Greece ravaged by the effects of Roman imperialism and civil war. While these experiences cannot have won Romans much love in Greece, they also demonstrated the organization and efficiency that Polybius had praised. As the republic was at last torn apart and reborn as an imperial monarchy, several authors from around the larger Greek world tried to come to terms with the facts of Roman power.

The geographer Strabo, who wrote in the late first century BCE and early first century CE, laid stress on the strength of Rome and praised its founders for their practical wisdom.³² His description of the cities of southern Italy, however,

throws a different light on the Romans:

Nowadays [the Greek cities of Italy] have all become thoroughly barbarian, except for Tarentum, Rhegium, and Naples. The Lucanians and Bruttii hold some of the land and the Campanians other parts, but these are only names and it is really the Romans who occupy the country, for these peoples have themselves become Romans.³³

He also remarked about some of the peoples of Gaul: “they are no longer barbarians but have taken on the character of Romans, their speech, their way of life, and their political habits.”³⁴ Strabo saw a hierarchy of cultures in which Romans occupied a middle position, neither Greek nor barbarian. Within that hierarchy, though, movement was possible. The Romans had a tendency of drawing others to the middle, making barbarians better but Greeks worse.³⁵

{175} The historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a contemporary of Strabo’s, expressed a different outlook on the Romans but similar concerns about ethnic fluidity and the dangers of degeneration. Dionysius opened his *Roman Antiquities* with his opinion that the Romans were, in fact, Greeks. Since many of his fellow Greeks persisted in thinking of the Romans as barbarians, he declared, he had taken on the task of setting them straight. He accordingly gave the Romans a legendary history in which they descended from settlers of various Greek origins. Furthermore, he presented the Romans as having surpassed the Greeks themselves in the classic Greek virtues of self-control, piety, justice, and courage.³⁶ These virtues, he asserted, were even more crucial than ancestry in judging who was a Greek:

For, in my opinion, Greeks are not distinguished from barbarians by name or language, but by intelligence and the inclination to proper behavior, and more than this by the fact that they do not behave inhumanly to one another. Those whose natures are of this kind, I think, ought to be called Greeks; those who are the opposite, barbarians.³⁷

Yet the end of Dionysius’ history raised troubling possibilities. He portrayed the Greeks of Tarentum at the time of their conflict with Rome as decadent and arrogant. They sneered at the imperfect Greek of Roman envoys, paying more attention to their grammatical slips than to the business of diplomacy.³⁸ By Dionysius’ definition, the Tarentines had become barbarians, while the Romans were the true Greeks. But if Romans were Greeks and Greeks could fall into barbarism, the Romans were in danger of doing the same. Although Dionysius ended his history long before the civil wars of the late Republic, he noted when Romans of the past had given in to the temptations of luxury and power, and added some remarks on the failures of Romans in his day to live up to the ideals of their ancestors.³⁹ For Dionysius, the Romans were the best of the Greeks, but even the best Greeks were in danger of becoming barbarians.⁴⁰

As the Mediterranean grew accustomed to more stability under the emperors, the Greeks were conscious of the special place they occupied among Rome's subjects. An education that included expertise in Greek literature and philosophy, rhetorical skills, and moral improvement—what the Greeks called *paideia*—became part of the standard upbringing of the Roman upper {176} classes and those who aspired to upward mobility.⁴¹ The Roman desire for Greek education, as well as for Greek artworks, antiquities, slaves, and other marks of status, could be parlayed into practical benefits. Cities that could claim a Greek pedigree courted the favor of the Roman elite while individuals who could sell their expertise in rhetoric, literature, philosophy, art, and other accomplishments sought their patronage. So many Romans preferred Greek doctors that few Romans even studied medicine.⁴² At the same time, the value of what these Greeks had to offer depended on an aura of cultural superiority that had to be maintained in the face of Roman domination.

The orators and scholars of the Second Sophistic were self-conscious about their relationship to both the classical past and the imperial present.⁴³ The historian Plutarch, active from the late first to the early second centuries CE, caught this ambivalence in his *Parallel Lives*, a series of biographies that paired great men of the Greek past with those of Rome who boasted similar accomplishments. The conquerors Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, for example, were paired, as were Cato the Elder and the famously honest Athenian statesman Aristides. These biographies played out a subtle argument that validated the Romans as worthy heirs of Greek culture but also positioned them as “junior partners,” whose accomplishments could be judged by Greek standards. Plutarch reflected on education with similar judgments. On one hand, the Romans' capacity to benefit from Greek education was proof of their civilized nature; on the other, Romans needed a thorough education to equal the intellectual and moral refinement that came naturally to Greeks.⁴⁴

The second-century CE Anatolian Greek orator Aelius Aristides, whose family had been granted Roman citizenship, conveyed a similar double message in his speeches. His *Panathenaic Oration* and *In Praise of Rome* placed Athens and Rome as parallel cities, but he gave the advantage to Athens. He praised Athens as a center of culture, history, and learning, while presenting Rome as a center of power and commerce. Athens “has always exhibited a pure, clean, uncorrupted culture, and has introduced a model of pure, clean, and agreeable common speech for all Greeks.” As for Rome,

the products of the whole earth and sea are conveyed here, of every season and country, from every river and pond, the skills of Greeks and barbarians alike. . . . Everything meets here: trade, travel, farming, metalwork, all the skills that are or ever were, everything that is made or grown.⁴⁵

{177} The comparison is subtle: everything came *to* Rome, but everything worth

having come *from* Athens. Rome's primacy was contingent on the changeable facts of politics, while Athens' greatness was inherent in the land itself: "Greece is in the center of the whole earth, Attica in the center of Greece, and the city of Athens in the center of Attica."⁴⁶ His praise of Rome's success in creating peace in the world seems sincere, but Rome was measured by Greek standards.⁴⁷

As time went on, Greeks increasingly came to identify with the Romans. Greek historians of the second and third century, such as Appian, Cassius Dio, and Herodian, often took Roman history, rather than Greek, as their subject. After the emperor Constantine moved the center of imperial power east to the old Greek city of Byzantium in the fourth century, the state still identified itself as the Roman Empire. Greeks who lived under this new arrangement began to call themselves Romans, as they continued to do for more than a millennium.

As varied as they are, the surviving Greek sources represent only the smallest window into Greek attitudes toward the Romans. The many Greeks who found employment and patronage under Roman rule, who were slaughtered or enslaved by Roman armies, or whose lives were little touched by Rome are mostly mute to us. Those whose opinions have come down to us show a wide range of responses, from Melinno's praise of Roman strength to Plutarch's doubts about Roman education.

Roman Attitudes toward Greeks

While the Greeks were ambivalent about the Romans, the Romans had a knotty relationship with the Greeks. From early in their history, Romans adopted elements of Greek culture, as many of the Greeks' trade partners did. Greek writing was known in central Italy as early as the eighth century BCE, and in the sixth century, the Greek heroes Castor and Pollux were invoked in an inscription at Lanuvium (Lanuvio), within a day's journey of Rome.⁴⁸ By the fifth century, the oracle at the Greek colony at Cumae in southern Italy {178} was regarded by the Romans as a source of divine truth.⁴⁹ As Rome emerged on the Mediterranean stage, it confronted the Hellenistic kingdoms whose Greek self-identification set the terms of diplomatic relations.

Romans of the Republican period saw Greek learning as a source of authority and incorporated it into how they thought about the history of their city. Legend held that the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, had been sent away to be taught Greek writing and martial skills as children.⁵⁰ Similarly, legend claimed that when the Romans first felt the need for a written law code, they sent out ambassadors to consult the laws of Athens and other Greek cities.⁵¹ As Romans became more familiar with Greek culture from the third century BCE on, they adopted features of Greek artistic and literary culture, in contexts ranging from comic theater to political oratory.⁵² The prestige of Greek learning was so great that the first Roman to write a history of Rome, Fabius Pictor, wrote it in Greek.⁵³

At the same time, Romans of the Republican period also suspected that the Greeks looked down on them. Cato warned his son away from Greek doctors: “They have taken an oath among themselves to kill all the barbarians . . . and they call us barbarians, too.”⁵⁴ What Cato considered a matter of life and death, the comic playwright Plautus turned into a self-deprecating joke. In the introduction to a play based on a Greek original, he called his action of rewriting the story in Latin “translating it into barbarian.”⁵⁵ Conservative Romans sought an alternative to Greek *paideia* in native Roman traditions that emphasized bravery in war, diligence in work, and dutiful service to family and state, rather than philosophical sophistication. This project went along with efforts to free Roman culture from Greek influences by developing the terse, un-Greek style of oratory favored by Cato and writing history in Latin on the basis of Roman traditions.⁵⁶

{179} By the late Republican and early imperial periods, Romans had begun to reframe their relationship with the Greeks. Fabius Pictor’s emulation and Cato’s nativist antagonism both gave way to a new equilibrium in which Greeks and Romans were each acknowledged to have their own areas of expertise. Greece was preeminent in the intellectual arts such as poetry, philosophy, sculpture, and astronomy. Rome was superior in the practical arts of conquest, governance, and law. On these terms, the two could coexist to their mutual benefit: Roman order made the world safe for Greek erudition.

The poet Virgil, in the late first century BCE, gave this perspective one of its classic statements:

Others will mold the breathing bronze more smoothly,
I am certain, bring forth living faces from marble,
plead their lawsuits better, measure out
the movements of the heavens, and name the rising stars.
Remember, Roman, that you shall rule the world’s peoples by your
power.
These will be your arts: to impose the laws of peace,
to be merciful to the conquered and subdue the arrogant.⁵⁷

The “others” who will perfect these arts are not named, but Virgil’s audience would have recognized typically Greek skills in this litany.⁵⁸ Virgil’s friend and fellow poet Horace put the idea more succinctly: “Captive Greece captivated its savage conqueror and brought the arts to rustic Latium.”⁵⁹

Virgil and Horace worked under the patronage of Augustus, who promised a return to traditional Roman values. Their views of Greek and Roman aptitudes were congenial to Augustus’ propaganda, but they were echoed at the other end of the political spectrum by the statesman Cicero, a champion of republicanism, who also praised Greece as the birthplace of civilization. In a letter to his brother, then serving as governor of Asia (the Roman province in western Anatolia that included the Ionian cities), he counseled:

Since we are governing those people from whom civilization not only arose but is held to have spread to others, surely we should bestow its benefits as much as possible on those from whom we ourselves received it. . . . What I have achieved in life has been through the learning and arts handed down to us as an inheritance from the Greeks.⁶⁰

{180} Not only were Greece and Rome celebrated for different accomplishments, the great achievements of the Greeks were placed in the past, while Rome's were present or yet to come. In one speech, Cicero described Athens as the land from which "civilization, education, religion, agriculture, rights, and laws were born and spread to all lands," but he went on to describe contemporary Greece as "now weak and practically broken," sustained only by the glories of the past.⁶¹ Horace elaborated on the same theme, arguing that while the best Greek poems were the oldest, Roman literature had only gotten better with the passage of time. Contemporary Greeks, he declared, were like children, always impatient to try something new, but Romans had the discipline to stick with their studies.⁶²

The Greeks' ability to reinvent their culture and adapt to new circumstances was recast as a failing. While Horace called it childish impatience, others depicted it as craven duplicity. Virgil, retelling the story of the fall of Troy from the Trojan perspective, had his hero Aeneas comment bitterly on Greek deceit.⁶³ His contemporary, the historian Livy, put similar attitudes into the mouths of the Roman Senate in a disapproving response to some clever diplomatic maneuvering by a Roman field commander:

Our ancestors did not make war with ambushes and nighttime raids, nor by feigning flight and suddenly turning back on an incautious enemy, nor did they celebrate cunning above true courage. . . . This is the Roman way, not the craftiness of Carthaginians or the guile of Greeks, who think it more glorious to trick the enemy than overcome them by force.⁶⁴

The satirist Juvenal, in the late first or early second century CE, voiced a comically exasperated version of the same theme:

Quick-witted, damned audacious, always ready with a speech, and they can out-talk Isaeus [a famous orator]. What do you suppose that one is? He's brought us a bit of everything: schoolteacher, professor, surveyor, painter, wrestling coach, seer, tight-rope walker, doctor, magician—your hungry little Greek does it all! Tell him to fly and up he goes!⁶⁵

This disdain for the Greeks, though, was as much moralistic posturing as a sincere sentiment. Despite the speech reported by Livy, the Senate voted {181} to

ratify the Roman commander's cunning diplomacy. However outraged a pose Juvenal might have struck for comic effect, his poetry made innovative use of Greek literary and theatrical models.⁶⁶ Greek culture, past and present, had an undeniable appeal to many Romans, especially in the peaceful years of the empire. The second-century CE author Aulus Gellius fondly reminisced about his student days in Athens when he and other Roman youths who had come to learn from the city's philosophers would amuse themselves at dinner parties by debating trivial points from both Greek and Roman literature.⁶⁷ At around the same time, the Greek medical writer Galen referred to his Roman audience as "those who are born barbarians but cultivate the ways of Greeks."⁶⁸ Juvenal, in his curmudgeonly fashion, described another kind of emulation among Roman women:

For what can stink worse than an Italian woman who won't
think herself worth looking at unless she's gone all Greek,
from Apennine to Athenian? Everything must be in Greek now,
when what should really embarrass us is not knowing Latin.
They use that lingo for fear, anger, joy, worry,
to pour out the secrets of their soul, and you know what else?
They make pillow talk in Greek! Now, you could stand for that in a girl,
but you who are pushing eighty-six
and still at it in Greek? That's no decent talk
from an old lady. When you let out a frisky
"Zoë kai psychē!" [My life and soul!] you're using in public
what should stay in the bedroom.⁶⁹

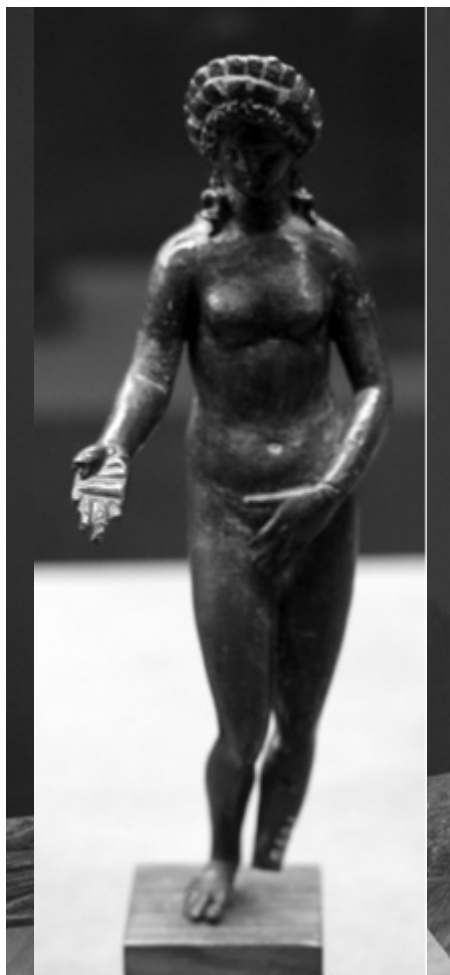
Despite the show of disapproval, the fact that Juvenal found these affectations suitable material for satire suggests that they were not uncommon. Other ancient authors confirm that Greek was often used for pillow talk among Romans of higher social class.⁷⁰

As with Greek attitudes toward the Romans, Roman attitudes toward the Greeks were complicated and changeable. Conflicting perspectives always existed, but there were conventional themes that writers could deploy as needed to support their own agendas. In this way, Roman perceptions of the Greeks resembled classical Greek perceptions of the Persians. Indeed, some of the recurring themes echo common Greek views of Persia. The narrative of {182} a formerly noble, upright, militarily vigorous people who had become weak, decadent, and dishonest could have come from the pages of Xenophon's *The Education of Cyrus* or the heroic biographies of Alexander.⁷¹ It is a mark of how complicated the relations between Greeks and Romans were that those Romans who were most hostile to the Greeks were also the most in tune with Greek literary traditions.

Greco-Roman

Over the centuries of their interaction, Greeks adapted to the rise of Roman power and found their place as specially favored subjects of Rome, while Romans took on elements of Greek culture, often transforming them in the process. From this long history of engagement emerged a shared culture, widely disseminated not only among Greeks and Romans themselves but across the territory of the Roman Empire. We refer to this shared culture as “Greco-Roman.” Those who adopted elements of Greco-Roman culture did not lose their distinct identities and fuse into an undifferentiated society. Rather, Greco-Roman culture was a tool with which identities could be negotiated, asserted, and questioned. Those who took part in it did not necessarily feel a common bond with all Greeks and Romans, but they engaged with a shared collection of ethical values, social practices, literary and mythological references, and historical exemplars. Through a kind of triangulation, individuals and communities could establish their own identities and claims to authority by defining themselves in relation to both Greece and Rome.⁷²

The *Annales*, a historical epic poem by Ennius, shows some of the complexities that played out in this interaction. Ennius came from an Oscan-speaking community in southern Italy and wrote in the late third and early second centuries BCE. The *Annales* is one of the earliest histories in Latin, but Ennius wrote it using the dactylic meter of Greek epic. His narrative drew on both Roman and Greek historical traditions but centered on the city of Rome. Ennius claimed his authority to write about Roman history by asserting that he was the reincarnation of the Greek poet Homer, according to the doctrines of the Pythagorean school of Greek philosophy.⁷³ In this work, Ennius, neither Greek nor Roman himself, combined Greek and Roman culture in multiple ways.⁷⁴



Another Roman marble statue of Venus, from the early first century CE, in the National Museum of Byzantine History, Filopoli National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

These three Roman depictions of the goddess of love, Venus, were inspired by a famous statue of Aphrodite (the Greek goddess whom Romans equated with Venus), from the fourth century BCE, by Praxiteles, now lost. These and many other variations on the same model show both how much Roman art drew from Greek art and how freely Roman artists and their patrons interpreted their Greek inspiration.

{183} While some parts of Greco-Roman culture took shape through this kind of interweaving of traditions, other parts reflected the power dynamics of empire as Greek culture was appropriated to serve Roman purposes, such as in the Roman response to Greek philosophy. The Greek Stoic tradition, with its emphasis on social duty and self-control, was particularly appealing to Romans who prized emotional steadiness and service to family and state. But Roman Stoicism diverged from its Greek sources, particularly in the interest Roman Stoics showed in family responsibilities and women’s moral merits, reflecting broader differences between Roman and Greek traditions on family and women’s social roles.⁷⁵ Other Greek philosophical traditions were also adopted and

discussed by Roman thinkers. The poet Lucretius composed {184} an epic poem explaining Epicurean speculations about a material universe free from divine intervention, and Cicero attempted to explain the doctrines of many different Greek philosophical schools in Latin with examples drawn from Roman history.⁷⁶



{184} The “Alexander Mosaic,” showing an artist’s imagination of the confrontation between Alexander the Great and Darius III at Issus, 333 BCE. This floor mosaic, installed in a private house in Pompeii around 100 BCE, was a reproduction of a second-century BCE wall painting at Pergamon. The wall painting is now lost, but the mosaic, damaged, is currently in the National Archaeological Museum, Naples.

The Roman elite also enthusiastically collected works of Greek art, some of it bought or commissioned, but some of it taken as plunder from sacked cities such as Syracuse and Corinth.⁷⁷ There was also a thriving market for copies of famous compositions, but these works were often transformed for the preference of Roman buyers. Greek statues cast in hollow bronze were copied in marble to suit Roman tastes. This change of medium often required changing the composition by adding new elements such as tree trunks and hanging drapery to support the heavier stone. In other cases, only the heads of full-body statues were copied. A public wall painting of a battlefield confrontation between Alexander the Great and Darius III from Pergamon was reproduced as a floor mosaic in a private home in Pompeii.⁷⁸

Whether originals or copies, these artworks were displayed to show off not only their Roman owners’ wealth but also their sophistication. Cicero, in a {185} letter to a friend who had undertaken to purchase Greek statues on his behalf and rather botched the job, conveys the anxieties of a Roman aristocrat trying to keep up with his neighbors:

My dear Gallus, everything would have been easy if you had bought the statues I wanted at the prices I set. . . . You compare those Bacchae

statues [women driven into a frenzy by Dionysus] with the Muses that Metellus has gotten? How are they alike? . . . Muses would have been appropriate for my library and matched my interests—but where do I have a place for Bacchae? . . . I am in the habit of buying such statues as may adorn an exercise ground in the style of a [Greek] gymnasium. But what would I, the promoter of peace, want with a statue of Mars [the god of war]?⁷⁹

In their display of Greek antiquities, as in their pursuit of philosophy and other traditionally Greek arts, wealthy Romans both confirmed their intellectual refinement according to Greek standards and demonstrated their dominance over the Greek world, present and past.⁸⁰

This paradox—that Romans were eager to prove both how Greek they could be and how much better they were than the Greeks—arose from one of the crucial questions at the heart of Greco-Roman culture: were the Romans Greeks or barbarians? At least as early as the third century BCE, a third option was available: Romans were Trojans. The origins of this story are uncertain. It was promoted by Timaeus in the third century, but it seems to have developed gradually and been a topic of debate for a long time.⁸¹ According to the version of the story eventually given canonical form in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Trojan hero Aeneas rescued the survivors of Troy after the Greeks captured the city. The refugees settled in central Italy, where the descendants of Troy, allying with the native Italians, founded the cities of Lanuvium and Alba Longa. Many generations later, Aeneas' descendants, Romulus and Remus, founded the new city of Rome.

Creating a mythic ancestry for a foreign people that brought them within the scope of Greek traditions was a typical Greek practice. Greeks had done the same in the past for peoples ranging from the Persians to the Scythians. From the Greek point of view, equating Romans and Trojans was a backhanded compliment, since the Trojans were almost—but not quite—the equals of the Greeks. For the Romans, identifying with the Trojans served many purposes. By extending their ethnic genealogy back to Troy, Romans asserted that they were not newcomers on the Mediterranean scene. Their pedigree rivaled the Greeks', but it was also distinct. The Romans did not have to measure up to Greek standards and had nothing to prove: the Greeks, after all, could not overcome Trojan might in a fair fight. Also, unlike the many Greeks who were reluctant to accept the Romans as cultural equals, there were no Trojans around to object.⁸²

The Romans' capacity for incorporating others into their society had always been part of their strength as an imperial state. In some ways, the Greeks followed where peoples such as the Etruscans and Sabines had gone before. In other ways, the encounter between Rome and Greece was unique. The Greeks did not simply join the other insiders under Rome's rule; they reshaped how insiders and outsiders were defined. The ability to extemporaneously compose Greek poetry, like Augustus on Capri, or furnish a house with suitable Greek

statuary, like Cicero, became crucial markers of belonging among Rome's elite. At the same time, Greeks lived under the shadow of Roman power. From Polybius the political hostage to the Greek guests at Augustus' table, Greeks knew that their position, prestige, and sometimes very survival depended on Roman favor. Greece and Rome did not meld into one, but belonging to one required figuring out a relationship to the other.

Living with Greece and Rome

In 71 CE a woman by the name of Tettia Casta was honored in Naples with a public burial. A woman of means, she had acted both as a benefactor to the city and as priestess of a women's religious association. Her fame and connections were great enough that the Roman Senate voted to erect a statue in her honor.⁸³ Tettia Casta had a Latin name, but her monument was inscribed in Greek. Naples was an old Greek colony, but the religious association she headed had close parallels in Rome and other Roman cities. The inscription lauded her *euergesia*, a traditional Greek type of civic patronage, but she was also celebrated by the Senate. Her identity, at least as a public figure, was composed of both Greek and Roman elements. It is difficult for us to say whether we ought to think of her as a Roman or a Greek.⁸⁴

The examples of Cato in Athens and Augustus on Capri show one way in which Romans and Greeks could relate to one another: self-consciously minding the line between the two cultures, even when making a show of crossing {187} it. Tettia shows another way. It is not that she blurred the line between Roman and Greek—the Roman parts of her life were unexceptionably Roman and the Greek parts thoroughly Greek. Rather, she and those who honored her seem to have lived contentedly with both.

Romans and Greeks did not stop thinking about their cultural relationship. From Melinno's poem praising Rome in explicitly Greek terms to Plutarch's parallel biographies of Greek and Roman heroes, from Plautus' self-deprecating joke acknowledging his debt to Greek playwrights to Juvenal's overblown anti-Greek screeds, Greeks and Romans alike kept trying to pin down exactly where their cultures stood in relation to one another. At times, this cultural tussling must have played out awkwardly—we can only imagine the discomfort of Augustus' Greek guests on seeing their Roman hosts parade around in "Greek" costumes. Still, the concerns of historians and satirists were not always the concerns of ordinary people. Many who lived in the Roman Mediterranean found ways of living with both Greece and Rome, like Aulus Gellius in his happy student days or Tettia Casta setting the example for her city. The interaction of Greek and Roman culture could be a source of conflict, confusion, snobbery, and sarcasm, but the two could also be combined in ways that made room for both. All the same possibilities must have been available in the interactions of every other culture in the ancient Mediterranean.

1. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Life of Cato the Elder" 1.
2. *Ibid.*, 12.
3. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, "The Deified Augustus" 98.
4. Catherine Baroin and Emanuelle Valette-Cagnac, "S'habiller et déshabiller en Grèce et à Rome (III): Quand les Romains s'habillaient à la grecque ou les divers usages du *pallium*," *Revue Historique* 309, no. 3 (643) (July 2007): 517–51.
5. de Grummond, *Etruscan Myth*, 12–13; Bonfante and Bonfante, *Etruscan Language*, 203.
6. See the contributions to Pia Guldager Bilde, Inge Nielsen, and Marjatta Nielsen, eds., *Aspects of Hellenism in Italy: Towards a Cultural Unity?* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1993).
7. Livy, *History of Rome* 21.49–51, 22.37, 23.21; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 10.41.
8. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 29.1.12.
9. Suetonius, *De Claris Rhetoribus* 1; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 12.68 (= 547a).
10. Livy 21.49–51, 27.16.
11. Livy 33.32–33, 42.47.
12. Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.11; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 7.16.
13. Elizabeth Rawlinson, "Roman Expansion," in *The Roman World*, ed. John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 39–59.
14. Pliny the Elder 35.58.
15. Walter Scheidel, "Quantifying the Source of Slaves in the Early Roman Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 87 (1997): 157–69; Sarah Pothecary, "Strabo the Geographer: His Name and Its Meaning," *Mnemosyne*, 4th ser., 52, no. 6 (December 1999): 691–704.
16. For example, the devastation of Athens and the crushing fines imposed on Greek cities by Sulla after revolts in the 80s. See Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Life of Sulla" 14; Appian, *Mithridatic Wars* 9.
17. Glen W. Bowersock, "The Barbarism of the Greeks," in *Greece in Rome: Influence, Integration, Resistance*, ed. Charles Segal (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 3–14.
18. Tim Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
19. Mary T. Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 147.
20. Craig Champion, "Romans as BAPBAPOI: Three Polybian Speeches and the Politics of Cultural Indeterminacy," *Classical Philology* 95, no. 4 (October 2000): 425–44; Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity*, 224–26.
21. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Life of Camillus" 22.2.
22. Lionel Pearson, *The Greek Historians of the West: Timaeus and His Predecessors* (Atlanta: Scholars' Press, 1987), 49–51. See, for example, the warm approval of Timaeus voiced in Cicero's dialogue on oratory: Cicero, *On Oratory* 2.14.
23. Polybius, *Roman History* 2.12.
24. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Life of Flaminius" 16.
25. Melinno, *Hymn to Rome* (quoted in Stobaeus, *Anthology* 3.7.12).
26. Cecil Maurice Bowra, "Melinno's Hymn to Rome," *Journal of Roman Studies* 47, nos. 1/2 (1957): 21–28.
27. Polybius 6.3–56.
28. Craig B. Champion, *Cultural Politics in Polybius' Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 80–97.
29. Polybius obliquely connected Romans with barbarians in discussing a Roman custom of horse sacrifice—a common practice among barbarians, he says. This is not explicit, but highly suggestive. See Polybius 12.4; Champion, "Romans."
30. Polybius 1.37, 10.15.
31. Polybius 5.104, 9.37–39, 11.4–6.
32. Strabo, *Geography* 5.3.7–9.
33. Strabo 6.1.2. The actual cultural situation in southern Italy was a good deal more complicated than Strabo made it out to be. See Bowersock, "Barbarism"; Kathryn Lomas, "Greeks, Romans,

and Others: Problems of Colonialism and Ethnicity in Southern Italy,” in Webster and Cooper, *Roman Imperialism*, 135–44.

34. Strabo 4.1.12.

35. Edward Ch. L. van der Vliet, “The Romans and Us: Strabo’s *Geography* and the Construction of Ethnicity,” *Mnemosyne*, 4th ser., 56, no. 3 (2003): 257–72.

36. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 1.4–5, 57–58.

37. Dionysius of Halicarnassus 14.6.

38. Dionysius of Halicarnassus 19.5.

39. Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.6, 5.60, 77, 10.17, 20.4–5.

40. Irene Peirano, “Hellenized Romans and Barbarized Greeks: Reading the End of Dionysius of Halicarnassus,” *Antiquitates Romanae*, *Journal of Roman Studies* 100 (2010): 32–53.

41. Romans tended to discard athletic practice, another key piece of Greek *paideia*. William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 238–39.

42. Pliny the Elder 29.8.

43. Kendra Eshelman, “Defining the Circle of Sophists: Philostratus and the Construction of the Second Sophistic,” *Classical Philology* 103, no. 4 (October 2008): 395–413.

44. Simon C. R. Swain, “Hellenic Culture and the Roman Heroes of Plutarch,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 110 (1990): 126–45; Mossman, “*Taxis ou Barbaros*.”

45. Aelius Aristides, *Panathenaic Oration* 15; *In Praise of Rome* 200–201.

46. Aelius Aristides, *Panathenaic Oration* 16.

47. Sulochana Asirvatham, “No Patriotic Fervor for Pella: Aelius Aristides and the Presentation of the Macedonians in the Second Sophistic,” *Mnemosyne*, 4th ser., 61, no. 2 (2008): 207–27; Francesca Fontanella, “The Encomium on Rome as a Response to Polybius’ Doubts about the Roman Empire,” in *Aelius Aristides between Greece, Rome, and the Gods*, ed. William V. Harris and Brooke Holmes (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 203–16; Estelle Oudot, “Aelius Aristides and Thucydides: Some Remarks about the *Panathenaic Oration*,” in Harris and Holmes, *Aelius Aristides*, 31–50.

48. *Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae* 1271a; Calvert Watkins, “Greece in Italy Outside Rome,” in Segal, *Greece in Rome*, 35–50.

49. Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62.

50. Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.84.

51. The result was the law of the “Twelve Tables.” Livy 3.31; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 10.52, 54.

52. Elizabeth Rawlinson, “The Introduction of Logical Organization in Roman Prose Literature,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 46 (1978): 12–34; Richard L. Enos, *Roman Rhetoric: Revolution and the Greek Influence* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1995); Catherine Connors, “Monkey Business: Imitation, Authenticity, and Identity from Pithekoussai to Plautus,” *Classical Antiquity* 23, no. 2 (October 2004): 179–207.

53. Christina Shuttleworth Kraus and Anthony John Woodman, *Latin Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.

54. Cato the Elder, *To His Son Marcus* (quoted in Pliny the Elder 29.14).

55. Plautus, *Trinummus* 19.

56. Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline* 9; Suetonius, *De Claris Rhetoribus* 1; Athenaeus 12.68 (547a). See S. E. Smethurst, “The Growth of the Roman Legend,” *Phoenix* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1949): 1–14.

57. Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.847–53.

58. Sophia Papaioannou, “Founder, Civilizer, and Leader: Vergil’s Evander and His Role in the Origins of Rome,” *Mnemosyne*, 4th ser., 56, no. 6 (2003): 680–702.

59. Horace, *Epistles* 2.1.156–57.

60. Cicero, *Letters to His Brother Quintus* 1.1.27–28.

61. Cicero, *For Flaccus* 62.

62. Horace, *Epistles* 2.1.28–33, 93–117.

63. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.18–20, 35–38, 43–49, 65–66, 105–6, 152–53, 195–98.

64. Livy 42.47.

65. Juvenal, *Satires* 3.73–78.

66. Catherine Clare Keane, "Theatre, Spectacle, and the Satirist in Juvenal," *Phoenix* 57, nos. 3/4 (Autumn–Winter 2003): 257–75.
67. Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 18.2.
68. Galen, *On the Preservation of Health* 1.10.
69. Juvenal 6.185–96.
70. Michael Fontaine, "The Lesbia Code: Backmasking, Pillow Talk, and *Cacemphaton* in Catullus 5 and 16," *Quaderni urbinati de cultura classica*, n.s., 89, no. 2 (2008): 55–70.
71. Vincent J. Rosivach, "The Romans' Views of the Persians," *Classical World* 78, no. 1 (September–October 1984): 1–8.
72. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
73. Ennius, *Annales* fragments 2–3, 14. Cf. Horace, *Epistles* 2.1.50–52.
74. Jackie Elliott, *Ennius and the Architecture of the Annales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 198–232.
75. Gretchen Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics: Self, Responsibility, and Affection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
76. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*; Gisela Striker, "Cicero and Greek Philosophy," in Segal, *Greece in Rome*, 53–61.
77. Cicero, *Second Oration against Verres* 1.19–21; Pausanias 7.16.
78. Bettina Bergmann, "Greek Masterpieces and Roman Recreative Fictions," in Segal, *Greece in Rome*, 79–120.
79. Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 7.23.
80. Elaine K. Gazda, "Roman Sculpture and the Ethos of Emulation: Reconsidering Repetition," in Segal, *Greece in Rome*, 121–56; Mary Beard and John Henderson, *Classical Art: From Greece to Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 79–105.
81. Polybius 12.4. Note Polybius' skepticism. Trojans may have been earlier associated with the Etruscans, but the sources are fragmentary and difficult to interpret. See Nicholas Horsfall, "Some Problems in the Aeneas Legend," *Classical Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1979): 372–90.
82. Gruen, "Cultural Fictions"; Gruen, *Rethinking the Other*, 243–50.
83. *Inscriptiones Graecae* 14.760.
84. Kathryn Lomas, *Rome and the Western Greeks* (London: Routledge, 2011), 176–79.

BEING ROMAN

Three Jewish rabbis found themselves discussing the Romans in Judaea one day in the early second century CE. Rabbi Yehuda said, “How fine are the works of this people! They have made streets, they have built bridges, they have erected baths.” The second rabbi remained silent, but the third, Rabbi Shimon bar Yoh.ai, answered: “All that they made they made for themselves; they built market-places, to set harlots in them; baths, to rejuvenate themselves; bridges, to levy tolls for them.”¹

These were dangerous times in which to debate the merits of Rome. In 66 CE a Jewish revolt against Roman rule had led to a terrible and costly war that ended in 73 with Jerusalem sacked, the Temple destroyed, and hundreds of thousands of Jews killed, enslaved, or in exile.² A generation later, in 115, an uprising among the Jews of the diaspora led to further bloodshed and ended only after two years of fighting that left some settlements almost depopulated. Disgruntled mutterings among Jews were not to be taken lightly.

The rabbis’ conversation was reported to the Roman authorities, who ordered that Yehuda, who had praised Rome, should be rewarded, the rabbi who remained silent should go into exile, and Shimon should be put to death. To escape this sentence, Shimon and his family fled into the wilderness where they lived in a cave for more than a decade, hiding from Romans and pro-Roman Jews alike. Meanwhile, Yehuda was granted a position of authority that gave preeminence to his interpretations of Jewish law and custom.³

Many people throughout the empire confronted the same question that occupied the rabbis: what did it mean to be Roman? Was it to be desired or shunned? From its earliest foundations, Roman culture had been accessible to outsiders. Romanness had its appeal, not least because of the practical {190} advantages that could come from being in favor and the pressures that the empire could bring to bear on those who encouraged resistance. At the same time, many of the mundane choices people made about their culture—what to eat, how to dress, which gods to approach with their daily problems—were made in contexts in which Roman power had little sway and local traditions were still strong. Different people in different places and times found different answers to the same questions.

Romanization?

While responses to Roman culture varied widely on the regional and individual level, on the large scale, cultural changes in the first centuries of the Roman Empire are unmistakable. Across the empire, many people began to speak, dress, eat, worship, build their homes and towns, pursue their careers, and engage in local politics in ways that resembled or were connected to Roman practices. In the western empire, people widely adopted the Latin language and characteristically Roman elements of material, artistic, and social culture. In eastern regions, Roman customs entered the already multilayered Hellenistic cultural landscape. The adoption of Roman cultural traits by people under Roman rule is known as “Romanization.”

The concept of Romanization as a historical phenomenon was first promoted by the German historian Theodor Mommsen and the British archaeologist Francis Haverfield in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ Mommsen was an advocate of German unification who urged the diverse peoples of the nascent nation to assimilate into a unified German culture, while Haverfield was a proud imperialist who believed that Britain had a duty to spread its civilization to the peoples it ruled over.⁵ They and other scholars of the age defined Romanization in accord with the politics of the times. On one hand, Romanization was seen as an imperial policy to spread civilization, in its refined Roman form, to the uncultured barbarians who filled the provinces of the empire. On the other, it was assumed that inferior societies, on encountering a superior one, would naturally adopt its ways.⁶ For most of the {191} twentieth century, these two aspects—benevolent imperial policy and natural barbarian imitation—were considered sufficient to explain the cultural changes under Roman rule. As late as the 1970s, “Romanization” could be invoked as an unproblematic explanation for changes in the language, social structures, and material culture of the provinces.⁷

As imperialism, both modern and ancient, came under increasing critique in the second half of the twentieth century, historians began to question the will and the capacity of the Roman state to impose such broad transformations on provincial populations.⁸ Discarding the concept of “superior” and “inferior” societies led scholars to consider the agency of provincial peoples and to reexamine why they chose to adopt elements of Roman culture, and why those particular elements that they did, in the ways that they did.

Some historians saw Romanization as a process by which the provincial elite adopted Roman traits in order to better compete for power and position within the empire. The “Romanness” of Roman culture was less important than its cachet as the culture of a dominant elite. Ordinary provincials who started eating off Roman-style dishes and having their legal documents drawn up in Latin cared less about being Roman than about keeping up with their most privileged neighbors.⁹ Other scholars described the changes in the provinces as a struggle between Roman and native cultures in which the natives resisted foreign practices

or adopted them only as a shallow veneer to placate the conquerors. In this conception, the “Romanness” of Roman culture was its most important characteristic. Those who imitated the ways of the imperial elite did so purposefully under political pressure, while the survival of native culture represented acts of resistance.¹⁰

Since the end of the twentieth century, scholars have begun to critique these models of Romanization as well, pointing out that they remain fixed in a binary mode of thinking with “Roman” and “native” as the only terms. More recent attempts to explain cultural shifts under the empire see them less as the process of one culture supplanting (or failing to supplant) another than as the growth of a new cultural landscape in which individuals and {192} groups actively created new ways of life drawing on many different sources.¹¹ The results were complex and contested. While some people in the provinces embraced the idea of Romanness and some resisted it, many more adopted some elements of Roman identity while ignoring others and fused those elements together with non-Roman practices in novel ways. Romanness was not a fixed point toward which provincials could gather. Roman culture was a living thing, changing and adapting, with its own internal arguments about what did or did not belong. Engaging with this culture did not mean passively receiving a standard package of traits but staking a claim in that ongoing discussion.¹² Some modern scholars have even rejected the term “Romanization” as too simplistic to describe this cultural transformation and prefer to speak of “creolization” or “globalization.”¹³ As our understanding of Romanization continues to evolve, the most important shift in thinking has been to recognize that it is not an explanation but a phenomenon that needs to be explained.

Becoming Roman

By the early first century CE, the Roman Empire had conquered most of the territory that it was to control for the next several centuries. After the immediate trauma of conquest had passed, the peoples of the empire had to adapt to living under Roman rule. Between the first century and the early third century, many people coped with Roman rule by adopting elements of Roman culture. Despite the assumptions of earlier scholarship, there is little evidence that the Roman government took an active role in spreading its culture to the provinces.

The ideal of *Romanitas* encompassed traditional Roman and Italian virtues such as steadiness under pressure and the dutiful observance of social hierarchies. These values overlapped with the qualities that Roman writers in the first century BCE had begun to describe as the essential components of a proper way of life, such as moderation, honesty, and steadfastness—a moral composite they termed *humanitas*.¹⁴ Roman writers used these standards of *Romanitas* and *humanitas* as a measuring stick for the moral worth of non-Roman peoples and the progress of Roman allies {193} and subjects toward earning Roman trust and favor, but few

expressed a drive to actively spread those virtues, let alone the mundane habits of Roman daily life.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the attitudes of Roman emperors, governors, and generals who came to the provinces with the ideas of *Romanitas* and *humanitas* in mind must have affected the behavior of those who dealt with them. This kind of pressure from above may be reflected in the only explicit description of a Romanizing policy. The historian Tacitus, writing in the late first and early second centuries CE, noted how his father-in-law Agricola, as governor of Britain, sought to bring peace to the Britons by introducing Roman customs:

In order to take a people so prone to war because of their scattered and uncivilized life and accustom them to peace and quiet through the desire for luxuries, he would privately encourage and publicly assist those who wished to build temples, marketplaces, and homes, extolling the swift and upbraiding the slack. The desire for his esteem took the place of compulsion. He began to teach the sons of the chieftains in the liberal arts and praised British skill over Gaulish effort, so that rather than reject the Latin language they desired to speak it even more eloquently. They came to favor our manner of dress and the toga appeared everywhere.¹⁶

Although Tacitus dutifully flattered his father-in-law, an examination of the evidence from Britain suggests that the cultural changes in the province were far broader and more nuanced than can be explained by official encouragement from above.

After conquest, the Romans entrusted local administration to British peoples who had aligned themselves with Rome. Many of these peoples built up their centers of power with new buildings of Roman types, but there is little sign that the impetus for these projects came from above. The Roman administration in Britain did not have the resources for the kind of assistance Tacitus described, and many of the new structures, though they resembled Roman examples, were built using techniques already known in Britain in the century before Roman conquest.¹⁷

The evidence for language use from inscriptions and surviving documents shows a far more complex interaction between Latin and the languages of Britain than can be explained by the education of a limited elite. Inscriptions in {194} the province record the distinctive features of regional dialects influenced by extensive bilingualism and the use of Latin at different social levels.¹⁸ Recorded names likewise show the traces of a long period in which Latin and British were used in the same social contexts.¹⁹ Similarly, while elements of Roman dress were widely adopted in Britain, the result was not a replication of Roman style but the creation of a distinctively Romano-British style, drawing on both Roman and local traditions with its own unique features and regional variations.²⁰



{194} Brooches like this one, known as “dragonesque” because they seem to represent stylized heads of fantastic beasts, were used as clothing fasteners in Roman Britain. They were part of a distinctive Romano-British style of dress. First or second century CE, found in Northumberland, currently in the British Museum, London.

These and other elements of Roman culture intersected with one another and with native British practices in ways that cannot be readily disentangled. Consider, for example, one of the curse tablets deposited, probably in the second century, in the sacred spring at Aquae Sulis (modern Bath):

I, Docilianus, son of Brucerus, offer the person who stole my cloak to the most holy goddess Sulis. Whether they be man or woman, slave or free, may the goddess Sulis hound them to utter ruin and allow them no sleep and no offspring, now or yet to come, until they return my cloak to the temple of her power.²¹

Docilianus and his father both had names with British and Latin elements.²² Docilianus wrote in Latin, though with atypical spellings (even spelling the same word two different ways), and some of his expressions suggest a passing {195} familiarity with the formulas of Roman legal texts.²³ He called the stolen item a “caracalla,” an originally Gaulish type of hooded cloak that became popular with the later Roman army.²⁴ The language and form of his curse—written on a lead sheet and deposited in a sacred place—is typical of curses throughout the Roman world, but it addresses the goddess only by her British name, “Sulis,” not the joint name “Sulis Minerva” used by Romans to link the goddess of the local

spring to their own goddess of wisdom.²⁵ He, along with many others, placed his curse in Sulis' sacred spring, which had been venerated since long before the Roman conquest but which by his day was surrounded by a Roman-style temple and bath complex. To place Docilianus on a scale that runs from "British" at one end to "Roman" on the other would be an impossible task. The cultural transformations he represents involve far more than Tacitus imagined.

The Roman tradition of openness to outsiders helped encourage these transformations. While the extension of Roman citizenship to new peoples could be a contentious issue, as it had been with the Italians in the late Republic, it was an established custom.²⁶ Citizenship was routinely granted to certain individuals, including those who served in local governments and retiring auxiliary veterans. It could also be awarded as a favor to individuals and families and was eventually extended to nearly all free inhabitants of the empire.

While Roman high society could be insular and snobbish, it also welcomed into its ranks many who came from outside of Italy. The first-century poet Martial, for one, wrote fondly of his old family home in Spain and called himself "born of Iberians and Celts, a citizen of the Tagus."²⁷ At the same time, he moved among the highest circles of Roman society, both praising its wonders and ridiculing its vices.²⁸ Aelius Aristides praised Rome for extending its citizenship to the great and good in all parts of the empire.²⁹ Many of the other leading lights of Roman letters, politics, and law had provincial origins. Suetonius, secretary to the early second-century emperor Hadrian and {196} biographer of the early emperors, came from Hippo Regius in North Africa (modern Annaba, Algeria) where he dedicated an inscription celebrating his accomplishments in imperial service.³⁰ Ulpian, another imperial secretary from the late second to early third centuries and one of the major authorities on Roman law, came from the old Phoenician city of Tyre.³¹

The emperors themselves demonstrate the expansion of the Roman elite. The original Julio-Claudian dynasty (27 BCE–68 CE) was a union of two Roman noble clans. The next dynasty, the Flavians (68–96), were Italian gentry. Many of the following emperors down to Commodus (died 192) had their roots among Italian colonists in Spain. The Severan dynasty (193–235) drew from the aristocracies of North Africa and Syria. In the chaotic third century, when many frontier generals seized power, emperors came from all over the empire: Thrace, Arabia, North Africa, Illyria, and Gaul.³² Over the centuries, the Roman aristocracy became more cosmopolitan as it drew in the ambitious and talented from the provinces.

The cultural transformations of the empire were not, however, just a pull toward Rome for social-climbing aristocrats. People at all levels engaged with elements of Roman identity. Some explicitly laid claim to the name of Roman, such as a soldier on the Danubian frontier who identified himself as both a Frank and Roman in his epitaph, or a third-century orator from the Aedui of central Gaul who proclaimed: "What people in all the world is more in love with the Roman name than the Aedui?"³³ Many more adopted some expressions of

Romanness, such as building in Roman style, using Roman types of pottery, or employing Latin or Greek for such varied purposes as filing court cases, marking graves, and invoking curses on their enemies.

Those at lower levels of society often engaged with Roman culture in different ways than the elite. For ordinary people, there were economic opportunities in getting connected to wider trade routes and richer markets, as well as in service to Rome and its army. Service in the auxiliaries, units of the Roman {197} army drawn from noncitizens and foreigners from across the frontier, could be a step toward citizenship and economic security for many poor people and their families.³⁴

At the same time, reorienting local economies toward Rome often came at the cost of disrupting traditional social and economic structures.³⁵ The wealthy elite of North Africa, who had long controlled large estates worked by dependent peasants, adapted easily to Roman ways of doing business. Outside of these estates, however, most people lived in villages where farmland was owned collectively by clan and family groups. The introduction of a Roman legal regime, which favored private landownership, upset the traditional village way of life. Some ambitious peasants struck it rich, such as one who had an inscription set up at Mactaris (modern Mactar, Tunisia) in the second century CE to celebrate his rise from a life of poverty to become a senator.³⁶ Those less fortunate, meanwhile, were left to fend for themselves as traditional institutions were weakened and supplanted by Roman practices.³⁷

People had been becoming Roman since the days of the Sabines and Etruscans, but becoming Roman when “Rome” stretched from Britain to Arabia was a different matter. No single quality or package of traits could define it. People who spoke Latin but lacked citizenship, or who were citizens but spoke no Latin, could equally call themselves Romans. For others, being Roman meant drinking Greek wine and eating bread made from Egyptian grain off of dishes made in Gaul while wearing clothes made of silk from China. As people all across the empire found their own ways to become Roman, they created new and different answers to the question of what being Roman meant.

Being Roman

That question—“What is a Roman?”—had never had a simple answer, but under the empire, many people examined the interactions of Romans and barbarians for answers.

One answer was given visual form on the monumental column erected in Rome to celebrate the emperor Trajan’s victories in Dacia (approximately modern Romania) in the early 100s CE. A sculptured frieze runs in a spiral up the column, filled with depictions of Romans and Dacians. This work of propaganda was intended to promote Trajan’s legitimacy as emperor and {199} silence critics of his wars on the Danubian frontier. It contrasted the soldiers of the Roman

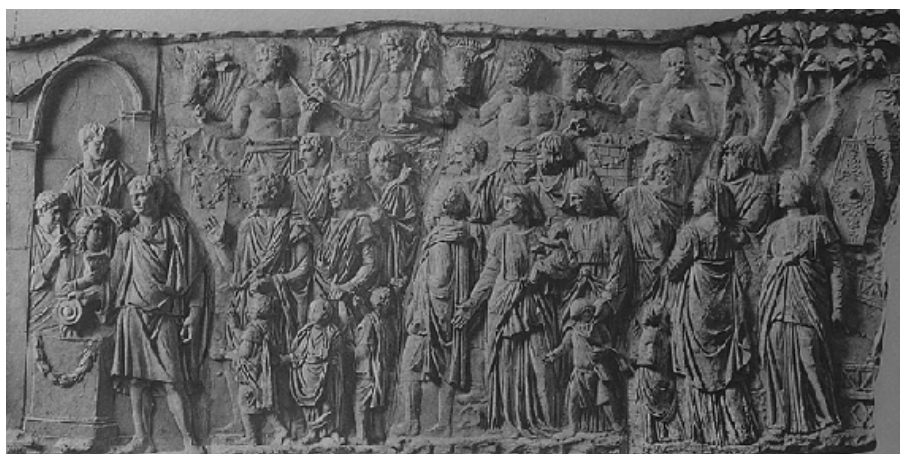
legions with the barbarian Dacians and Trajan with the Dacian king Decebalus. In the narrative laid out on the column, the Romans advance and the Dacians retreat. The Romans march through provincial towns distinguished by stone bridges, walls, and temples. The Dacians hide in wild mountains and forests. Trajan is portrayed calmly giving orders and receiving reports; Decebalus is shown fleeing in disarray. The contrast is clear: Romans are on the side of order, acting with discipline and forethought to impose peace on a wild land, while the Dacians represent the chaos and indiscipline that Rome must tame.³⁸



{198} A cast of a section of Trajan's Column (Rome, early second century CE). In the center, Roman legionaries overlap their shields in the *testudo* formation to protect themselves as they assault a Dacian fortress, shown to the left and above. To the right, Roman auxiliaries (distinguished by their fringed jerkins and oval shields) assemble in a much less organized formation.



From Trajan's Column, auxiliaries (right) present a Dacian prisoner to Trajan (left, flanked by officers), while behind them legionaries are building a fort.



{199} Cast of a section of Trajan's Column. Dacian provincials assemble to greet the emperor. The crowd includes bearded men wearing Dacian-style cloaks, clean-shaven men in Roman togas, women, and children. Religious officials and sacrificial animals are gathered in the background, preparing to carry out a sacrifice in proper Roman fashion.

Yet the narrative on Trajan's Column is more nuanced than a simple division of Roman vs. barbarian, for there are many figures who do not belong fully to either. In the frontier towns, the emperor is greeted by a mixed company of locals, some of the men clean-shaven and dressed in Roman style, others bearded and wearing local garb. Women and children join them as well. The whole community is thus represented, highlighting its potential for peaceful growth under Roman rule. They are not exactly Romans, but they are more than barbarians.³⁹ Among the Roman soldiers, citizen legionaries, {200} in their steel armor, are distinguished from barbarian auxiliaries in leather jerkins and mail shirts. The two play very different roles. The legionaries mostly fell trees and build forts, taming the wild land and imposing order. When they do fight, they execute coordinated maneuvers such as forming the protective *testudo* of overlapping shields when assaulting a defended wall. The auxiliaries charge against the enemy in a jumbled mass and take the heads of their foes as trophies. The sculpture places the auxiliaries, like the provincial civilians, somewhere between barbarian and Roman, for they are under the emperor's command (emphasized by a scene in which some of them display their trophy heads to him) and serve the aims of Roman civilization, though they do so in un-Roman ways.⁴⁰ On Trajan's Column, Romans and barbarians are not so much opposites as points on a continuum. The Romans represent an ideal toward which others can strive, and even those at the barbarian end of the scale have a place under Rome's benevolent rule if they are willing to accept the emperor's command.



{200} From Trajan's Column, auxiliaries (right) display the severed heads of Dacians to Trajan (left) while in the foreground more auxiliaries charge into a battle still going on to the right.

The distinction between Roman and barbarian could be blurred in other ways. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus confirmed the ascendancy of Rome in his work while still centering a Jewish worldview. Josephus had been a priest in Jerusalem and a general in the army that rebelled against Rome in 66 CE, but he defected to the Romans and, after the war, wrote several histories with imperial backing. He wrote for an elite Roman audience, presenting Jewish history in Roman terms, but at the same time fitting the Roman Empire into a Jewish model.⁴¹ For Josephus, Rome was the latest {201} manifestation of a pattern familiar in Jewish thought: the foreign conqueror used by God as an instrument to punish the Jews for failing to uphold their traditions. Josephus saw himself in the same prophetic mold as Jeremiah, who centuries earlier had warned the Jews that the invading Babylonians were empowered by divine wrath.⁴²

For Josephus, just as the Romans had a place in Jewish history, so the Jews had a place in Rome. He forcefully defended his people against the slurs of earlier writers.⁴³ He also asserted the importance of the Jews in subtler ways. His works held up the great figures of Jewish history, such as Moses the lawgiver, as worthy parallels to the famous figures of the Greek and Roman past.⁴⁴ Even in defeat, the Jews retained a symbolic significance. In describing the triumphal procession with which the emperor Vespasian and his son Titus celebrated the defeat of the

rebellion, Josephus focused his attention on the sacred objects taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and looked ahead in time to recount their installation some years later in the Temple of Peace, a sort of museum in Rome where the public could view the treasures captured in Vespasian's campaigns and other wonders collected from around the empire.⁴⁵ The image he created was not one of defeat but of integration. Through the calamity of the destruction of the Temple, the most sacred Jewish treasures ended up in a place of honor alongside the great works of Greeks, Egyptians, and other peoples of the empire. In the same way, the Jewish people, through the calamity of revolt and war, had ended up as worthy members of the Roman state.⁴⁶ Despite the long-standing tensions between Romans and their Jewish subjects, Josephus' efforts to make Romanness and Jewishness compatible were well received by his Roman audience. The emperor Titus favored the historian by including his works in the imperial library, and Josephus was honored with a statue in Rome.⁴⁷

Even some works that seem to assert a divide between Roman and barbarian turn out to be more complex than they appear. The satirist Juvenal laid out {202} Roman prejudices against Egyptians but also reflected those prejudices back on his fellow Romans. The narrator of Juvenal's fifteenth *Satire* lambastes Egyptians for their peculiar religious beliefs and tells a gruesome tale about a fight between two villages that ended in murder and cannibalism.⁴⁸ The poem, however, undercuts the narrator and points out his ignorance and hypocrisy. He blames Egyptians for bloodthirstiness and mocks their gods, but the goddess he holds up as superior is Artemis, who demanded human sacrifice in the legends of the Trojan War. At the beginning of the poem, he sneers at Egyptians for abstaining from meat and even certain vegetables, but at the end of the poem he praises the Pythagoreans, a Greek philosophical movement, for precisely the same practices.⁴⁹ The Roman narrator's bigotry rebounds back on him as his attempt to portray Egyptians as barbarians only ends up showing that he is the uncivilized one. Juvenal's choice of target for this satire shows that such prejudices existed, but also that they were ripe for rebuke like the other vices satirists took aim at.



{202} A scene from the Arch of Titus, constructed in Rome c. 82 CE by Titus' younger brother and successor as emperor, Domitian, to celebrate the defeat of the Jewish uprising. Treasures from the sack of the Temple in Jerusalem are carried in procession by Roman soldiers.

Tacitus, Juvenal's contemporary, also used narratives about barbarians to reflect unflatteringly on his fellow Romans. Tacitus was a political pessimist {203} who believed that imperial Rome was sinking into decadence, a decline that good emperors could delay but not avert.⁵⁰ While Tacitus made much of the outrages committed by emperors such as Nero and Domitian, some of his harshest critiques of Rome were accomplished through writing about barbarians.

Tacitus' account of how Agricola encouraged the Britons to adopt Roman ways ends with a bitter conclusion:

Little by little, the Britons succumbed to the allure of these vices, enjoying the street life, the baths, and elegant dining. They called this "humanitas," when it was really part of their enslavement.⁵¹

The failure to properly name the corrupting effects of Roman life is a recurring theme for Tacitus. An invented speech by a Caledonian leader from northern Britain gives a biting perceptiveness criticism of Rome: "They falsely call stealing, slaughtering, and ravaging 'empire,' and where they have made a wasteland they call it 'peace.'" ⁵² Tacitus likewise compared German and Roman sexual morals by remarking: "No one [in Germany] laughs at vice or calls seductions and love affairs 'fashionable.'" ⁵³ In these comparisons, it was the barbarians who had the ability to perceive the truth. The Britons lost that capacity by becoming Roman.

The inability to distinguish true from false was part of Tacitus' critique of Rome. In accepting the rule of emperors, he felt, Romans had become willingly

blind to the loss of their freedoms. Like the Britons, they had learned to call their enslavement “humanitas.” Once that line had been crossed, they lost the ability to perceive the other moral failings of their age. Meanwhile, the barbarians who had never accepted the emperor’s rule remained clear-eyed and able to call out Roman hypocrisy for what it was.⁵⁴

Tacitus’ view of civilization fit a model that had been worked out by earlier writers. According to this model, a people begins with rustic hardiness. They have none of the refinements of civilization but possess the simple virtues of bravery, honesty, and endurance. These virtues lead them on to success over other peoples and to living more sophisticated, cultured lives. The comforts of civilization, however, sap them of the strengths with which they began and inculcate greed, ambition, cruelty, and other vices. They slip into decadence {204} and abandon their original virtues. In the end, another people, in an earlier state of simple virtue, overcome them. It was a story that Greeks had told about Persians and Romans about Greeks, and that pessimistic Romans of Tacitus’ stripe had begun to tell about themselves.⁵⁵

This does not mean that Tacitus admired barbarians. In the *Germania*, the most detailed ethnographic treatise to survive from the Roman world, Tacitus made clear that he found the Germans contemptible: lazy, violent drunkards who lived in poverty and squalor.⁵⁶ Whatever the faults of Romans, Tacitus was glad to be one and not a German. Still, he attributed some worthy qualities to the Germans. They were brave, honest, and uncorrupted by the temptations of civilization. Their modes of government resembled the ancient practices of the early Roman Republic, with distinguished noblemen making decisions backed by an assembly of warriors. Their religious piety, though simple, was honest and free of sycophantic emperor worship.⁵⁷ Tacitus’ Germans were the classic “noble savages”: they were indeed noble, but they were also savage. They reflected back to the Romans both the heights to which the sophistication of Roman civilization had risen and the depths of moral decay toward which Tacitus felt Rome sliding.

There was no one way of being Roman. Imperial propaganda celebrated Roman superiority and the ability of barbarian provincials to work their way toward civilization while Tacitus and others of his persuasion bemoaned the decay of Roman values. The Roman tradition of openness to outsiders was strong, and elite provincials such as Josephus could assert their people’s right to a place in the Roman world, but there had always been those already in the center of that world who resisted letting anyone else in, like the bigot Juvenal held up for ridicule. Augustus had espoused a traditional idea of Romanness to unify his empire. In following generations, as Roman society grew to include more and more people who did not share those traditions, it is no surprise that the question of what it meant to be Roman found so many different answers.

Not Becoming Roman

Peoples all around the empire found ways to survive, advance, and thrive under the Roman regime. While some were contemplating what it meant to be Roman, there were others whose solutions rejected Romanness or who made it only part of a larger identity.

{205} The most tenacious resistance to Romanness came from the Jews. While some, such as Josephus and Rabbi Yehuda, sought to unite Jewishness and Romanness, others refused to assimilate. Ethnic and political conflicts in the region had roots well before the arrival of Rome, but conflicts between Jews and Romans tended to flare up over specific matters of culture and identity.

Emperor worship was the most visible sticking point in the early years of the empire.⁵⁸ The compromise solution, whereby Jews sacrificed to their own god for the emperor's well-being instead of to the deified emperors, was tested by both Roman demands and Jewish resistance. The breakdown of religious accommodations between Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions led to the First Jewish Revolt in 66 CE.⁵⁹ In 115 a revolt among the Jewish community of Cyrene quickly spread to other parts of the Roman East. In several places this revolt specifically targeted non-Jewish religious sites.⁶⁰ In 132 another revolt began in Judaea, led by Simon bar Kokhba and provoked in part by the emperor Hadrian's plans to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, still in ruins from the First Jewish Revolt, as a Roman city under the name of Aelia Capitolina. An unreliable source adds that Hadrian banned circumcision.⁶¹

Among the Jewish communities of the diaspora outside of Judaea, as in many other traumatically dislocated populations throughout history, some Jews assimilated into the surrounding culture while others preserved their identity through the conscious assertion of their difference.⁶² In many places, Jews participated in the same material culture, social habits, and local civic life as other Roman provincials while still finding ways to distinguish themselves as a community. As long as things remained peaceful, Roman authorities were often willing to accommodate Jewish ways of life.⁶³

Many other peoples also rebelled against Rome. While revolts that happened shortly after conquest tended to be framed in political and economic rather than cultural terms, they also reflected the difficulties of adjusting to Roman rule. The usual grievances were excessive taxation and corrupt {206} administration, but anxieties about the standing of local groups under Roman authority were underlying issues.⁶⁴ In Britain the king of the Iceni, Prasutagus, allied with the Romans during their initial advance. When he died, Prasutagus bequeathed his kingdom jointly to his daughters and to Rome, attempting thereby to position his daughters as Roman clients, but the Romans refused to recognize their claim. In response, Prasutagus' widow Boudica led a rebellion in 60–61 CE.⁶⁵ The revolt of the Batavians in Germany in 69 CE similarly arose from Batavian soldiers' fears about their status in the Roman army.⁶⁶ With the passage of time and the development of more stable relations between the imperial administration and provincial peoples, many of these anxieties were eased.⁶⁷ Later generations, who had grown up under Roman rule, tended to feel more

secure of their standing. Tensions between Roman and native cultural systems became less a cause for violent uprising and more a matter of local negotiation, but the result was not the spread of a uniform Roman identity.

Literary sources give a skewed picture of the reception of Roman culture since the provincial writers whose work has survived tend to be those who aligned themselves with Rome. Artistic and archaeological evidence offers a broader, though still partial, view of how people reacted to Roman ways of life. Roman Gaul was home to a thriving ceramic industry, and while its products reflect the forms, functions, and styles of a wider Roman artistic repertoire, they are also distinctively Gaulish. Some features were practical adaptations to local conditions, such as the production of flat-bottomed jars for transporting wine and other commodities overland in wagons as opposed to the round-bottomed types favored in the Mediterranean for ship-borne cargo.⁶⁸ Others represent the survival of pre-Roman traditions or simply the tastes of local markets that were not the same as those elsewhere in the empire.⁶⁹ The mosaic workshops of Roman North Africa similarly developed a style drawing on Roman and Greek models but adapted to local tastes. The region was among the richest parts of the empire, and its elite could have afforded to import Roman artisans and imitate the latest Italian styles if they had wished, but instead they patronized distinctive local styles. North African mosaics featured many small scenes or figures arranged as if floating separately {207} in space, rather than the single large scene favored elsewhere in the empire.⁷⁰ Gallo-Roman pottery and North African mosaics, like many other provincial art forms, were shaped as much by local concerns and preferences as they were by Roman influence. If those who adopted them considered themselves Roman, their notion of Romanness was not one dependent on Rome itself.



{207} A mosaic in the Roman North African style, with individual figures and scenes separated by geometric decorations, from the House of the Ostriches, Sousse, Tunisia, third century CE. Compare with the Alexander Mosaic (p. 184), which follows the style preferred in other parts of the empire.

The cosmopolitanism of the empire also allowed for the spread of elements of material and social culture that were not originally Roman. Foreign luxuries such as Chinese silk and Baltic amber flowed through the Roman markets, as did provincial products such as the Gaulish caracalla, North African red-slip pottery, and Cyrenian *silphium* (a plant used as both medicine and spice). All of these commodities became part of the common culture of the Roman world. So too did a number of religious movements with roots far from Rome. The cult of Isis was already well established in Rome in the days of Augustus and spread farther around the Mediterranean.⁷¹ The cult of Mithras, based in part on Persian traditions, was popular among Roman soldiers from the Euphrates frontier to Hadrian's Wall in Britain.⁷² Manichaeism, a religion based on Persian, Indian, Jewish, and Christian inspirations, reached as far {208} as North Africa and western China.⁷³ Christianity, the religion that was to become predominant in the Roman world, was a development of Jewish traditions in contact with the Greek-influenced culture of the post-Hellenistic East.

Much of what we identify as the Roman culture of the empire was not simply Roman, nor did all the people of the empire accept that culture in the same ways. The changes that happened under the emperors were as much a matter of rethinking what it meant to be British, or Greek, or Egyptian in a multicultural context as they were of becoming Roman.

The Limits of Romanness

Early in this chapter we considered the “Romanization” of Britain and saw how even something as simple as a complaint about a stolen cloak reveals complicated strands of identity. We can close by looking to the other end of the empire, to Egypt, where despite the different physical and cultural landscape, we find many of the same ambiguities. In the desert west of the Nile is the “Great Oasis,” actually a pair of linked oases, Dakhla and Kharga. This area had been home to a number of small settled communities since Pharaonic times, continuing through the centuries of Persian and Macedonian rule. The Romans planted a fort here to guard the cross-Saharan routes leading south. Despite its small population and its place at the edge of the Roman world, the culture of the Great Oasis was just as complex as anywhere else in the empire.⁷⁴

Language is one window into the culture of the oases where the desert climate has preserved many documents written on papyrus or wooden tablets. The two major languages were Greek and Coptic, a late form of Egyptian. Both were used widely, and there is evidence for teaching in both languages, such as a wooden tablet marked with Coptic letters and a teacher's copy of a text by the classical Greek author Isocrates, both found at the town of Kellis.⁷⁵ The two languages tended to be used for different purposes, however; Greek documents are mostly administrative records or letters relating to business outside the oases, while Coptic was used primarily in religious contexts and for personal and family

communications.⁷⁶ Two other languages are also represented by a small number of texts: Latin, mostly connected with the Roman {209} fort at Kysis, and Syriac, in a few documents related to Manichaeism that were apparently being translated into Coptic for local use.⁷⁷

Closely related to language are naming customs. The names of some two thousand individuals from the oases are known from surviving documents.⁷⁸ This collection includes roughly equal numbers of Egyptian and Greek names, along with smaller numbers of Latin and biblical names (probably representing a Christian population). In a number of cases, Egyptian and Greek elements were mixed, such as “Psenapollon,” whose name combines an Egyptian prefix “Psen-,” meaning “child of,” with the name of the Greek sun god Apollo.⁷⁹ These different naming customs did not all belong to separate families. In the cases where we know the names of multiple people from the same family, they are equally likely to show a mix of linguistic sources as to be all the same.

In addition to the linguistic evidence for small Christian and Manichaean communities, there is literary and archaeological evidence for religious practices in the oases. Several temples have been documented in the area, almost all of them devoted to Egyptian gods. The only partial exception is a temple to the Greco-Egyptian god Sarapis.⁸⁰ The architectural style, decorations, dedications, and other religious accouterments associated with these temples also largely fit with Egyptian traditions. Not everything connected with religion is Egyptian, however. At several sites, inscriptions venerating the Egyptian gods were written in Greek.⁸¹ At Kysis a Greek inscription records a high priest of Sarapis whose name, Epius Olbius, is Latin.⁸² The small objects found in the temples are also mixed, including a Greek-style golden crown and a number of small panels painted in Greco-Roman style with both Greek and Egyptian themes.⁸³ A twenty-sided die from Dakhla was probably used for a Greek form of divination, but all its faces are marked with Egyptian characters.⁸⁴

{210} The Dakhla Oasis is also home to the tomb of Petosiris—whom we encountered in Chapter 1—a local official of the Roman state with an Egyptian name. Petosiris was buried in an Egyptian-style tomb where he had himself depicted wearing Roman clothes while being served bread and wine by two servants, one painted in Egyptian style, the other in Greco-Roman style.⁸⁵ Just like the curse tablet of Docilianus at Bath, the tomb of Petosiris is a reflection of an individual who cannot be simply classified as Roman or non-Roman.

If Petosiris and Docilianus had ever met, each one would have recognized some qualities in the other. They probably dressed in similar ways, were familiar with some of the same religious customs and social habits, and appreciated the same kinds of luxuries. If Petosiris’ official duties involved dealing with the Latin-speaking soldiers of the fort at Kysis, he and Docilianus would have had a common language. There are also many ways in which they would have found each other very strange. Petosiris had surely never heard of Sulis, nor would Docilianus have known what to make of the hieroglyphic texts in Petosiris’ tomb. It is hard to guess whether the similarities or the differences would have struck

the two men more forcefully.

Throughout the Roman Empire, there were people like Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Shimon who had strong and contrasting views about the Romans and whether being Roman was a blessing or a curse. There were also many people like Petosiris and Docilianus, who in some ways were Roman and in other ways were not. Even those who counted themselves among the Romans had many different views on what it meant to be one. For all of these people, the rule of the emperors and their subordinates was an inescapable pressure, but different people reacted to that pressure in different ways. The result of all these forces was not a coherent, empire-wide identity but a tumult of different ideas, interpretations, and conflicts that had no final resolution. To be Roman was to be a part of that complexity, not to simplify it down to a single answer.

1. *The Babylonian Talmud*, “Shabbat” 33b. Translation from Michael Bar-Asher Siegel, *Early Christian Monasticism and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 134.

2. The ancient sources differ wildly on the number of casualties, but the scale of the devastation was enormous. See Josephus, *Jewish War* 9.3 (1,197,000 killed); Tacitus, *Histories* 5.13 (600,000 killed). For comparison, modern estimates of the population of Jerusalem at this time range from 20,000 to 100,000. See J. Robert C. Cousland, *The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 60; Hillel Geva, “Jerusalem’s Population in Antiquity: A Minimalist View,” *Tel Aviv* 41, no. 2 (2013): 131–60.

3. Siegel, *Early Christian Monasticism*, 134–35.

4. Theodor Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte*, vol. 5 (Berlin, 1885), 176; Francis Haverfield, “The Romanization of Roman Britain,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 2 (1905–6): 158–217. Earlier uses of the term “Romanization” were limited to the spread of the Latin language without reference to other cultural features. See Richard Hingley, “Not So Romanized? Tradition, Reinvention, or Discovery in the Study of Roman Britain,” *World Archaeology* 40, no. 3 (September 2008): 427–43.

5. “Prof. Mommsen and the Jews,” *New York Times*, January 8, 1881, 3; Francis Haverfield, *The Romanization of Roman Britain*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), 10.

6. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *Histoire des institutions politiques de l’ancienne France*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1891), 134–39.

7. Howard H. Scullard, *Roman Britain: Outpost of the Empire* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), 46–57.

8. Richard Hingley, “The ‘Legacy’ of Rome: The Rise, Decline, and Fall of the Theory of Romanization,” in Webster and Cooper, *Roman Imperialism*, 35–48.

9. Millett, *Romanization of Britain*; C. R. Whittaker, “Imperialism and Culture: The Roman Initiative,” in *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism: Power, Discourse, and Discrepant Experience in the Roman Empire*, ed. David J. Mattingly and Susan E. Alcock (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1997), 143–63.

10. Marcel Bénabou, *La résistance africaine à la romanisation* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1976); Richard Reece, “Town and Country: The End of Roman Britain,” *World Archaeology* 12, no. 1 (1980): 77–91; David J. Mattingly, “From One Colonialism to Another: Imperialism and the Maghreb,” in Webster and Cooper, *Roman Imperialism*, 49–69.

11. Ralph Haeussler, *Becoming Roman? Diverging Identities and Experiences in Ancient Northwest*

Italy (London: Routledge, 2016), 27–74.

12. Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 11.

13. Webster, “Creolizing the Roman Provinces”; Rebecca J. Sweetman, “Roman Knossos: The Nature of a Globalized City,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 111, no. 1 (January 2007): 61–81; Rebecca J. Sweetman, “Domus, Villa, Farmstead: The Globalization of Crete,” *Hesperia Supplements* 44 (2011): 441–50.

14. Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 54–60.

15. Caesar, *Gallie War* 1.1, 1.11, 2.15; Tacitus, *Germania* 5, 28, 29. The classic mission statement of Roman imperialism in the *Aeneid* explicitly disclaims any duty to spread Roman culture. See Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.847–53. For one exception, see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 3.39.

16. Tacitus, *Agricola* 21.

17. Millett, *Romanization of Britain*, 69–85.

18. Eric P. Hamp, “Social Gradience in British Spoken Latin,” *Britannia* 6 (1975): 150–62. On the use of Latin as a social distinction in the provinces, see J. N. Adams, “‘Romanitas’ and the Latin Language,” *Classical Quarterly*, n.s., 53, no. 1 (May 2003): 184–205.

19. Alex Mullen, “Linguistic Evidence for ‘Romanization’: Continuity and Change in Romano-British Onomastics: A Study of the Epigraphic Record with Particular Reference to Bath,” *Britannia* 38 (2007): 35–61.

20. Ellen Swift, *Roman Dress Accessories* (Princes Risborough: Shire Archaeology, 2003).

21. Barry Cunliffe, ed., *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath*, Volume 2: *The Finds from the Sacred Spring* (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1988), 123, tablet 10.10. By ritually “offering” the cloak thief to Sulis, Docilianus was attempting to make hunting down the thief the goddess’s responsibility.

22. Mullen, “Linguistic Evidence,” 51.

23. It is not certain whether Docilianus wrote the tablet himself or hired a scribe to do it for him; the legal formulae and unusual spellings may have come from either. See J. N. Adams, “British Latin: The Text, Interpretation, and Language of the Bath Curse Tablets,” *Britannia* 23 (1992): 7; John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4–5.

24. John Peter Wild, “Bath and the Identification of the Caracalla,” *Britannia* 17 (1986): 352–53.

25. Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 3–4.

26. Claudius invoked past tradition to persuade reluctant senators to accept his grant of citizenship to the Gauls. See Tacitus, *Annals* 11.23.

27. Martial, *Epigrams* 10.65, 103, 104. The Tagus is the major river of the central Iberian Peninsula, now known as the Tajo in Spanish or the Tejo in Portuguese.

28. See how Pliny the Younger eulogizes him in *Letters* 3.21.

29. Aelius Aristides, *In Praise of Rome*.

30. L’année épigraphique 1953 (1954) 73.

31. Fergus Millar, “The Phoenician Cities: A Case-Study of Hellenisation,” *Cambridge Classical Journal* 29 (1983): 55–71.

32. Most of the emperors of this period are poorly documented, but the following seem likely: Maximinus Thrax, from Thrace or Moesia, possibly having Gothic or Alamannic ancestry: Herodian, *Roman History* 7.1; *Historia Augusta* “Maximinus” 2.5. Philip, from Arabia Petraea: Zosimus, *New History* 1.13. Aemilian, a Berber or “Moor” from Africa (modern Tunisia): *Epitome de Caesaribus* 31. Claudius Gothicus and Quintillus, of Illyrian ancestry: *Historia Augusta* “Claudius” 14. Aurelian, from a peasant family in Illyria, possibly of Roman colonial descent: Eutropius, *Compendium of Roman History* 13; *Epitome de Cesaribus* 35; *Historia Augusta* “Aurelian, Part 1” 3. Probus, another Illyrian peasant: *Epitome de Cesaribus* 37; *Historia Augusta* “Probus” 3. Carus, Numerius, and Carinus, from Gaul, of uncertain ancestry but possibly Gaulish, Pannonian, Carthaginian, or Roman: *Historia Augusta* “Carus, Carinus, and Numerian” 4; Eutropius 18.

33. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III 3576; *Panegyrici Latini* 8.2.

34. John C. Mann, “The Settlement of Veterans Discharged from Auxiliary Units Stationed in

- Britain,” *Britannia* 33 (2002): 183–88.
35. Webster, “Creolizing the Roman Provinces”; Jane Derosé Evans, Alain Ferdière, and Emmanuel Marot, “Anderitum: Excavations in a Roman Town in Gallia Aquitania,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 113, no. 2 (April 2009): 255–72.
36. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* VIII 11824.
37. Elizabeth Fentress, “Romanizing the Berbers,” *Past and Present* 190 (February 2006): 3–33.
38. Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 63–70.
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40. Jonathan C. Coulston, *All the Emperor’s Men: Roman Soldiers and Barbarians on Trajan’s Column* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2008). On the distinctions between legionaries and auxiliaries in actual military practice, see Catherine M. Gilliver, “Mons Graupius and the Role of Auxiliaries in Battle,” *Greece and Rome* 43, no. 1 (April 1996): 54–67.
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42. Jeremiah 21:1–10. See Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.351–54; Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Josephus, Jeremiah, and Polybius,” *History and Theory* 21, no. 3 (October 1982): 366–81; Jane Bellemore, “Josephus, Pompey, and the Jews,” *Historia* 48, no. 1 (1999): 94–118.
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49. Richard McKim, “Philosophers and Cannibals: Juvenal’s Fifteenth Satire,” *Phoenix* 40, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 58–71.
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80. Norman de Garis Davies, *The Temple of Hibis in El Khargeh Oasis, Part III: The Decoration* (New York: Plantin, 1953), 223–24, 228; Kaper, *Life on the Fringe*, 147–49; Robert B. Jackson, *At Empire’s Edge: Exploring Rome’s Egyptian Frontier* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 167, 175–80, 187–89, 195–97, 203, 205, 217.

81. Jackson, *At Empire’s Edge*, 175, 187–89, 205.

82. Kaper, *Life on the Fringe*, 152.

83. Helen Whitehouse, “A Painted Panel of Isis,” in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on*

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THE IMPERIAL FRONTIER

In 12 BCE, under the emperor Augustus, Roman armies advanced east from the Rhine to the next major river in Germany, the Elbe. The conquest was followed by several years of military administration that suppressed local unrest while securing lines of communication and supply. Some of the sons of local leaders were taken to Rome to be kept as hostages and to be educated so they might one day return to their peoples as friends of Rome. Among these young men were two of the Cheruscan chief Sigimerus' sons, whom the Romans called Arminius and Flavus.¹

The Elbe was never intended as a stopping point. By 6 CE, preparations were under way for the next push forward. Augustus' naval commander on the North Sea had made diplomatic overtures to the Cimbri, a people of the Jutland peninsula, through an exchange of gifts.² These were the expected diplomatic efforts before a new conquest: gathering intelligence on the target territory and building relationships with locals whose troubles could provide the necessary pretexts and who would serve the Roman administration afterward.³ The Rhine-Elbe territory seemed settled enough to be given a civilian government. Tapped for the job of governor was Quintillius Varus, a distinguished politician who had experience governing unruly frontier provinces.⁴ Flavus and Arminius, after a military education in Rome, were deemed ready to return home and assist the new governor.

A major uprising in the Balkans in 6 CE delayed planned campaigns for several years as troops were pulled away from the German frontier. Three years later, in 9 CE, when Varus was leading his soldiers into winter quarters, Arminius brought him news of a revolt. Ignoring warnings from advisers who distrusted Arminius' report—including Flavus—Varus set out at once with his three legions to quell the uprising.

The revolt was a fiction, and Arminius led the army straight into an ambush. An alliance of local tribes attacked Varus and his troops when they {212} were caught between a hillside and a lake, in dense woodlands that impeded legionary maneuvers. The fighting went on for days and ended with Varus dead by his own hand and the legions, nearly twenty thousand soldiers, almost wiped out.⁵ The location of this battle had no Roman name, but it has come to be known as the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. The precise location was long unknown, but

modern archaeology has uncovered the battlefield in the vicinity of Kalkriese, Germany.⁶



{212} One of the silver cups found in a burial at Hoby, Denmark. The scenes on this cup illustrate an incident from the *Iliad*: the Trojan king Priam (depicted here in stereotypically “Eastern” garb of trousers, loose tunic, cloak, and soft cap) kneels before the Greek hero Achilles to beg for the body of his slain son Hector. The image has complex implications for the diplomatic relationship the Romans were trying to create with the elite of Hoby. On one hand, the abasement of Priam before the heroic Achilles suggests the attitude of submission the Romans expected from “barbarian” leaders. On the other, the encounter between Priam and Achilles was a crucial moment of peaceful reconciliation between adversaries that demonstrated the possibility of mutual understanding even under the stresses of war.

On receiving word of the defeat, Augustus ordered guards posted around Rome to keep order and went into mourning. He reportedly beat his head against a door, shouting: “Quintillius Varus, give me back my legions!”⁷ There were fears that Arminius was in league with the rebels in the Balkans and a general revolt of the northern provinces might be coming. When this rebellion did not materialize, Augustus dispatched his stepson Tiberius, the future emperor, to deal with the situation in Germany. Tiberius conducted several years of campaigning, but when Roman honor had been satisfied, {213} the border was settled again on the Rhine. While Roman power and influence were still projected across the river through scouting, diplomacy, and occasional campaigns, no further attempts were made to conquer the land between the Rhine and the Elbe.⁸

Arminius led his coalition of tribes for the next decade, establishing the beginnings of a stable base of power in the region, but in 21 CE he was murdered by rivals, and the alliance he had built fell apart.⁹ Flavus continued to serve Rome loyally, and Arminius’ wife, Thusnelda, was captured and taken to Rome. There she was displayed as part of a triumphal procession but otherwise treated well.¹⁰

The events surrounding defeat of Varus reveal many of the problems of the Roman frontier. In one sense the frontier was a line that could be advanced or withdrawn to fixed limits, such as the Rhine and Elbe Rivers. In another sense, the frontier was a zone of complex interactions involving Roman soldiers and officials, traders, local aristocrats and their followers, and ordinary people of the region. Some of these people considered themselves Roman, while others did not. Frontier interactions could reach far beyond the frontier zone itself in both directions, from Flavus and Arminius' education in Rome to Augustus' diplomatic outreach to Cimbric chieftains. The movements of the frontier were often driven by the emperor's political needs while Roman commanders, such as Varus, often lacked the information they needed to make effective policy decisions.

The peoples of the frontiers had many different reactions to Rome. Some, such as Flavus and Sigimerus, aligned themselves with Rome. Others, such as Arminius, rallied resistance. Many more negotiated the space in between, siding with Rome when it was useful but ready to switch allegiances when it served their interests. The pressures on the frontiers, both from Rome and from foreign powers, created tensions and fissures that could not be resolved so long as the threat of Roman military power hung over the peoples who lived with them. Over the first two and a half centuries of the Roman Empire, from the beginning of Augustus' reign in 27 BCE to the end of Severus Alexander's in 235 CE, the societies of the frontiers slowly adapted to the realities created by Roman imperialism.

Examining the Frontiers

Frontiers are by their nature problematic. In theory, they are lines of military and political control. In practice, they are often zones of interaction, fraught {214} with ambiguities and tensions that may be hard for outsiders to grasp. Even relatively stable borders can be sources of conflict. The frontiers of an expansive empire like Rome were tangled in competing power structures and prone to economic, political, and cultural instabilities.

Scholarship on the Roman frontier since the late twentieth century has explored the space between two starkly opposed positions. One position, given its canonical expression by Edward Luttwak, sees the Roman frontier as the result of a strong and consistent imperial policy. This policy sought defensible borders to protect the empire and its interests from distant threats. The Roman army, with its fortresses, patrol roads, and walls, formed an inner ring of defense while barbarian kingdoms outside the frontiers were arrayed into a buffer zone of client states to absorb the initial shock of foreign invasion.¹¹ The other position, articulated most forcefully by Benjamin Isaac, sees the Roman frontier not as policy but as accident. Roman expansion was driven not by rational strategic calculus but by the emperors' need for glory and plunder. The Romans had

neither the administrative capacity nor the cultural inclination for long-term frontier policy, relying instead on local ad hoc arrangements to maintain power. The frontiers were the relics of previous campaigns of conquest that had stalled out or fallen back, just waiting for an emperor to revive them when it suited his needs.¹²

More recent scholarship has been working toward a middle ground between these two extremes.¹³ Historians who see the Roman frontier as a deliberate creation of military policy also recognize the limitations under which that policy was implemented: poor maps, no systematic gathering of foreign intelligence, lack of continuity between emperors, and inadequate imperial archives. Similarly, those who follow the model of frontier-as-historical-accident acknowledge that the Roman imperial administration invested significant resources into trying to maintain effective control over the territories it governed.¹⁴



{215} A section of Hadrian's Wall near Once Brewed in northern Britain. The wall stretches along the tops of the crags into the distance. In the low ground are the remains of Milecastle 39, one of many such fortified gateways spaced at mile intervals along the wall allowing travelers through under the supervision of Roman soldiers.

{215} Establishing a frontier was not as simple as drawing a line on a map and arranging troops along it. Roman methods of control depended on local collaboration and on the ability to coerce recalcitrant subjects and neighbors into compliance. These methods were harder to apply in regions that lacked stable power structures to work with and settled populations whose homes and resources could be threatened. The establishment of Roman control could itself deeply affect social and economic conditions. Roman support could help some

regional magnates overcome their competitors and reshape the political landscape. The expansion of Roman military influence, even beyond the designated frontier lines, created pressures that could not be ignored. Taxation, access to Roman markets, and the stationing of well-paid soldiers in frontier zones changed economic dynamics both inside and outside Roman lines of control.

In Europe, much of the empire had a linear boundary, demarcated either by rivers, notably the Rhine and Danube, or constructed barriers such as Hadrian's Wall in Britain or the palisade that ran between the headwaters of the Rhine and Danube in Germany. Similar linear frontiers existed in some parts of Asia and Africa, such as the Euphrates or the stretches of wall constructed in North Africa, but most of Rome's eastern and southern frontier {216} was just the desert or mountain fringe guarded by isolated outposts and forts stationed along roads, caravan routes, and corridors of seasonal migration.¹⁵ Even where there were defined frontiers, soldiers patrolled beyond these lines and maintained surveillance of foreign territory. Roman influence was extended through diplomacy and intimidation.¹⁶ The walls in Britain and Africa were not built to keep people out but to channel their movements to designated crossing points where they could be monitored and taxed. The Rhine and Danube Rivers were major routes of travel and trade in addition to marking the boundary of Roman administration.¹⁷

Frontiers also had an important relationship with the center of Roman power. A long, unstable frontier required constant management and could be a drain on resources and an emperor's attention. At the same time, it was dangerous to delegate frontier responsibilities as it allowed the emperors' subordinates the glory of conquering and pacifying troublesome regions. Some of these subordinates became rivals to the emperors on the strength of their military reputations and support from their soldiers. Some even succeeded in seizing power for themselves. The imperial monarchy was a novel and evolving construct dependent on military strength for its authority. Emperors could not afford to ignore the frontiers any more than peoples of the frontier zones could ignore the effects of Roman rule.

The World beyond Rome

The Roman Empire was involved in networks of trade, diplomacy, and influence that, at their greatest extent, spanned Europe, Africa, and Asia. In the north, a Roman glass cup was buried in a fourth-century grave mound in Føre, Norway, above the Arctic Circle.¹⁸ In the east, a Roman glass bowl was buried in a fifth-century tomb in the Nara Prefecture in Japan.¹⁹ In the south, four Roman beads made of glass, silver, and gold were deposited in a third-century context at a trading site at Mkukutu in Tanzania.²⁰ While these finds trace the outer edges of the reach of Roman trade goods, these regions were too far from the empire to

play much role in frontier society. It is doubtful {217} whether the nobles and merchants of Norway, Japan, and Tanzania who received these objects had any conception of the Roman Empire or knew where the luxury goods in their possession had been made.

Some knowledge of Rome reached China, where the Roman Empire was called “Great Qin.” Chinese sources reflect some eclectic but not inaccurate knowledge of Roman geography, government, and law.²¹ Romans had a similarly vague knowledge of the Chinese, whom they called “Seres,” being aware that their land was the source of silk and lay to the east beyond Parthia and India, but contacts were neither direct nor regular enough to leave much trace on the frontiers.²² The peoples, networks, and power centers that had a stronger impact on the frontier were found closer to the territory that the Romans had claimed as their own.

In North Africa, Roman administration covered the coastal agricultural regions, but in the broad zone of marginal lands between the coast and the Sahara desert there were numerous peoples, known to the Romans by such names as Mauri, Gaetuli, and Garamantes, who lived partly in and partly beyond the frontier region. Some of these peoples were dry-zone farmers who managed large-scale irrigation works. Others lived as nomadic pastoralists. There has been a long debate in the scholarship whether the settled and nomadic peoples of Rome’s desert frontiers, in Africa and elsewhere, lived in a state of cooperation or competition; the answer may well be both, depending on local circumstances and the fortunes of their farms and herds.²³

South of Egypt, on the middle reaches of the Nile, was the kingdom of Kush. In the aftermath of Octavian’s victory over Antony and Cleopatra and the incorporation of Egypt into the empire, Roman and Kushite forces clashed over control of the borderlands. After brief hostilities, Queen Amanirenas of Kush sent ambassadors to make a treaty with Augustus, and the peace held for most of the next few centuries.²⁴ Occasional diplomatic missions helped keep the peace. One of these, likely from the third century, appears to be documented by a Latin inscription at Musawwarat es-Sufra in which one Acutus from Rome formally presents his good wishes to an unnamed queen.²⁵ Evidence for the study of Greek in Kush may represent {218} local officials keeping up the necessary language skills to send their own ambassadors in return.²⁶ Kush also participated in the trade routes that connected the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean and central Africa. Concern for the security of trade may have encouraged both states to keep relations stable.²⁷

The Arabian frontier, like North Africa, presented a mix of settled kingdoms and nomadic peoples. The trade routes that passed through the region brought in substantial wealth but also further complicated the relationships between these societies. The Nabataean kingdom was a Roman client state for the better part of two centuries. Its capital at Petra was adorned with rock-cut temples in ornate Hellenistic style, and its kings were important regional leaders. Trajan annexed the territory in 107 as the province of Arabia Petraea, or “Rocky Arabia.” Other

kingdoms and tribal alliances competed for power and control of trade routes, sometimes allying with Rome and sometimes raiding the frontier.²⁸

The largest and most powerful of Rome's neighbors was the Parthian Empire. The Parthian state, though a match for Rome in its ability to muster forces for campaigning, was decentralized, prone to divisive court intrigue, and contained numerous semi-autonomous subkingdoms.²⁹ The administration of this unruly empire was as unwieldy a task as the administration of the Roman Empire with its restless provincials and ambitious generals. It is no wonder that, in the first century CE, the two empires mostly contrived to leave one another alone.³⁰ Nevertheless, Parthia loomed large in the Roman imagination. It remained the big prize, the enemy against whom flattering writers and propagandistic artists could always imagine emperors leading the good fight.³¹ Rome was equally significant to Parthian policy. The Parthian {219} kings positioned themselves as heirs to the Achaemenid dynasty and champions of the Iranian peoples against western aggression.³²

The period of relative stability was broken by Trajan, who invaded Mesopotamia and Armenia in 113. Although Trajan's conquests were quickly reversed by his successor Hadrian, Roman-Parthian relations remained unsettled for the following century. Several emperors initiated or contemplated military action against Parthia, and several Parthian kings pursued more aggressive policies on their western frontier. No substantial changes to the border were lasting, however, and diplomatic relations continued in between bursts of conflict.³³ The historian Herodian even reports that the emperor Caracalla, in the early third century, proposed marrying a Parthian princess, and that Caracalla's successor, Macrinus, celebrated a peace treaty and hailed the Parthian king Artabanus V as a loyal friend.³⁴

On the Black Sea steppes, a variety of nomadic and seminomadic peoples continued to live in traditional ways while some peoples of the region also developed settled kingdoms. Romans tended to describe the region in vague terms that drew as much on the literary tradition going back to Herodotus' Scythians as they did on contemporary knowledge, but we should not assume that life on the steppe was static.³⁵ Literary sources name various peoples in this region, including Sarmatians and Alans. In some cases, these names seem to correspond to identifiable ethnic and political groups, but they can also be unreliable, as the complexities of steppe identities were sometimes lost on writers from sedentary cultures.³⁶

In the late second century, there is evidence of cultural changes around the northern shores of the Black Sea and the lower Danube that may reflect the arrival of migrating warrior bands from somewhere to the north and west. These new peoples are reflected in a distinct archaeological pattern of settlement types, pottery styles, and burial practices. These features are the earliest evidence for a cultural pattern that would become more pronounced in the third and fourth centuries CE, which modern archaeologists have termed the Chernyakhov culture.³⁷ It is generally believed that the Chernyakhov culture is related to the

people known as “Goths” in the literary sources, but how {220} consistent the Chernyakhov-Goth connection is and how early we can speak of a Gothic presence in the region are matters of debate.³⁸

The Romans referred to the peoples who lived along the middle to upper Danube and Rhine as “Germans” (barring a few exceptions, such as the Dacians and Iazyges), but it is unlikely that the tribes and kingdoms of this region felt any kind of shared identity. Many individual tribal names are also known, but, as elsewhere, we cannot be confident that the Roman authors who recorded those names were applying them accurately.³⁹ Many cultures existed in this region with different kinds of social and political organization. Some, such as the Dacians and Marcomanni, appear to have reached an early stage of state development, with power centralized in well-established royal families. Other peoples, such as the Frisians, lived in small, egalitarian communities with little in the way of formal power structures.⁴⁰

Farther to the north, away from the frontier zone but in close contact with the Roman world, another major power was rising. At Himlingøje in Denmark, a group of lavish burials filled with Roman luxuries marks the center of a commercial and political network that established itself in the late second century and spanned the Baltic Sea and southern Scandinavia. The warrior nobles of Himlingøje fought as auxiliaries in the Roman army and maintained strong trade and diplomatic connections to Rome after they returned home. Through these connections they acquired Roman goods, which they then used as prestigious gifts to expand their network of influence in the North. The numerous ritual deposits they made in Danish bogs of the weapons and armor of their defeated enemies show that they expanded their power in more aggressive ways as well. While many of the peoples who lived closer to the Roman frontier had unsettled histories with Rome, the rulers of Himlingøje appear to have remained on good terms with the Romans throughout their history.⁴¹

Rome also had staunch allies in Scotland with the Votadini whose power center, a fortified hilltop site at Traprain Law, has yielded an extraordinary wealth of Roman imports ranging from gold brooches to iron door hinges. The precise boundaries of Votadinian power are uncertain, but other peoples {221} certainly lived beyond the British frontier, both in Scotland and Ireland. Some of these peoples had large, settled societies, but others were small and mobile.⁴²

The peoples who lived in and beyond the Roman frontier zone varied widely in their ways of life, social organization, and political structures. While some maintained long-term diplomatic ties with Rome, others had volatile relations with the empire. This wide variety of frontier peoples challenged Rome’s limited capacity for maintaining foreign relations and managing the frontiers.⁴³

Emperors and Frontiers

The frontier was always an area of special concern to the emperors, even those

with little direct experience of it. Imperial power depended on the support of two groups: the army, which was mostly stationed on the frontiers, and the people of Rome, who approved of victories over barbarians. Although imperial activity on the frontier could be haphazard and inconsistent, few emperors could afford to ignore the frontier entirely.

After the defeat of Varus, Augustus soured on expansion. He initiated no more conquests, and his final advice to his successor Tiberius was to keep the empire within its boundaries.⁴⁴ The meaning of this counsel has long been debated.⁴⁵ It is unlikely he meant that the empire should never expand again. The conquering ideal remained fixed in Roman ideology, and Augustus was not shy of bragging about the conquests accomplished under his authority.⁴⁶ More likely it was personal advice to his successor not to embark on a new series of foreign campaigns for political purposes.

On the whole, most of Augustus' successors followed his advice. On the grand scale, the frontier was mostly stable. There were only a few large additions to the empire in the following centuries: the southern half of Great Britain, parts of North Africa, Dacia, parts of Arabia, Armenia, and Mesopotamia. The conquests of Mesopotamia and Armenia were brief accomplishments of Trajan's and Septimius Severus' wars against Parthia and did not long endure. {222} Some of the expansions in Africa and Arabia came from incorporating client kingdoms rather than conquering new lands. On the small scale, however, the frontier was turbulent. Almost every emperor from Augustus to Severus Alexander fought frontier campaigns or faced unrest in frontier provinces. Most of these campaigns added little, if any, new territory to the empire, but few emperors actually treated the frontier as a limit not to be crossed.⁴⁷

Emperors who felt insecure in their position used foreign wars to prove their worth in the traditional expansionist mode. Claudius, who came to power unexpectedly, initiated the conquest of Britain, which the unloved Nero continued. Domitian, another surprise emperor, began his reign with a campaign in Germany that even his fellow Romans criticized as unwarranted.⁴⁸ Trajan, though he grew to be one of the most beloved emperors, came to power through obscure political machinations, which may help explain his ambitious program of conquests in Dacia and Mesopotamia.⁴⁹ Septimius Severus, the victor of a civil war, spent much of his reign fighting in Mesopotamia, North Africa, and Scotland. These campaigns not only showered military glory on the emperors but also enriched the empire with plunder and slaves while keeping potentially restless soldiers occupied.

Restless soldiers were no trifle. Revolt by troops who felt ignored by the emperors was a recurrent threat to imperial stability. Sometimes this discontent could be softened by letting the soldiers pillage across the frontier.⁵⁰ On other occasions, successful frontier generals could harness their soldiers' dissatisfaction in a bid for the throne. Vespasian and Septimius Severus both came to power in this way, and many more attempted the feat unsuccessfully or managed it only to be quickly ousted by a rival general.

While the Romans pushed the frontier, the frontier pushed back. There were few major incursions on Roman territory in the first centuries of the empire, but some threats demanded the emperor's attention. Relations with the Parthian Empire remained unresolved as both empires pressed for greater influence along their mutual border, but neither could secure a lasting victory over the other. Trajan, Severus, and Caracalla all led major campaigns against Parthia, but their gains did not last. The Parthians backed Pescennius Niger, a general in Syria who competed with Severus for power, but Pescennius' bid for the throne failed.

{223} Away from the Parthian front, the most serious threat to the Roman frontier in this period developed along the Danube in the late second century. Termed the Marcomannic Wars by modern scholarship, this diffuse and protracted series of conflicts involved many of the peoples of the region, chiefly the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Iazyges, and kept the emperor Marcus Aurelius occupied from the early 160s to 180. Smaller-scale troubles rarely claimed the attention of the emperors, but raiding, local resistance, and discontent among the soldiers were constant nuisances in the frontier zone that could flare up into more serious trouble if not kept in check.

Emperors undertook a variety of different policies toward the frontier. In the early empire, rulers such as Augustus and Nero were content to govern from a distance and entrust even major campaigns to subordinates, but the rise of frontier generals as claimants to the throne demonstrated that it was dangerous for an emperor to leave the frontier in anyone else's hands. There were those, such as Trajan and Severus, who threw themselves into aggressive frontier campaigning. Others, notably Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius, were led, either by temperament or circumstance, to focus on consolidating and defending the territory claimed by their predecessors. Only a few emperors such as Antoninus and Elagabalus largely ignored frontier problems, being either fortunate enough to rule in a period of relative calm or else too busy with their own concerns.

Because of the practicalities of governing a continent-spanning state in an age when messages could take weeks and armies months, if not years, to reach the frontier, an emperor's ability to effectively manage the frontier was limited.⁵¹ At the same time, as proven by generals such as Vespasian and Severus, delegation of too much power was risky. Wars against barbarians or restless provincials were potent propaganda tools, and emperors were wary of letting anyone else get their hands on them.⁵² It was a conventional charge against bad emperors that they did not trust their subordinates, but even the most popular emperors understood the importance of preserving personal control over frontier policy.⁵³ After the Julio-Claudian age, most emperors learned to keep frontier generals on a short leash.

The effects of imperial neglect can be seen on the British frontier. The archaeological evidence from Scotland shows a lively cross-frontier exchange in the first and early second centuries. Roman goods found their way into native hands, from fine enameled brooches and sets of bronze tableware to hinges and horseshoes. While the Votadini enjoyed a profitable alliance with the Romans,

deposits of mixed Roman and non-Roman scrap metal at several sites indicate that local smiths were also doing jobs for the Roman soldiers {224} stationed on the frontier. Even some modest farmsteads had access to Roman goods.⁵⁴ During this period of strong cross-border ties, many emperors devoted at least some of their energies to Britain, and the frontier was briefly advanced into Scotland in the mid-second century. Starting around 160, however, the Marcomannic Wars took imperial attention away from Britain for several decades. Despite some frontier shakeups under Commodus, it was not until 208 that another emperor, Severus, took an active interest in the province. Roman artifacts in Scotland show a corresponding decline after 160. Even casual exchanges, such as Scottish crafters working for frontier soldiers, seem to have dried up.⁵⁵ While we might have expected provincial commanders to take up the slack and maintain regional ties when an emperor was busy elsewhere, the Scottish evidence suggests that they did not—or, more to the point, they were not permitted to.⁵⁶

The Roman emperors' relationship to the frontier was contradictory. They could have enormous effects on frontier societies, whether by leading their soldiers out on campaign or by pulling them back and assigning them to border control. When an emperor turned his attention to a frontier area, it must have been akin to an earthquake or flood: an unpredictable, irresistible event that could change local conditions for generations, but whose aftereffects were mostly left to the locals to deal with. When they turned their attention elsewhere, their subordinates were limited in what they could do to compensate for their neglect. Most of the empire's frontiers, most of the time, were left to themselves, shaped largely by the actions of the peoples who lived along them.

The Army on the Frontier

The most stable Roman presence on the frontier was the army. While some frontiers were more fully militarized than others, all were marked with fortresses and outposts where Roman soldiers were stationed to maintain security and control. In regions with urbanized societies, such as Egypt and Syria, the army's influence was mostly limited to the hinterland zones. In other areas, where local societies functioned on a smaller scale, such as Britain {225} and Arabia, the army's effect on social and economic conditions was more widespread. Across the Roman world, the peoples who lived at the fringes of Roman power mostly knew Rome through its army, whose presence could be both beneficial and disruptive.

Soldiers were usually well paid, since the emperors depended on their loyalty. The regular provision of wages and supplies brought a steady flow of cash and merchants into regions that in many cases had previously been economically underdeveloped. The frontier army was a market for goods and services from both inside and outside the empire. In the West, the pottery and bronze industries of Gaul were stimulated by demand in the frontier regions.⁵⁷ The economic effect was less visible in the more developed East, but in outlying

regions such as the Egyptian oases, Roman forts provided a new market for local goods.⁵⁸ The reach of the frontier market extended well outside the range of Roman authority. Peoples as far away as Himlingøje and Mecca increased their leather and textile production to meet Roman demand.⁵⁹

The Roman army also offered employment to soldiers recruited in and beyond the frontier zone. Barbarian auxiliaries were a vital part of the Roman army for the same reasons that Greek mercenaries had been employed by Egyptians and Persians: economically underdeveloped regions make prime recruiting grounds for troops. After the revolt of Batavian soldiers serving near their homeland in 69 CE, the Roman army began to station auxiliary units away from the regions where they were recruited, so that future rebels would not have the benefit of being surrounded by their own people. Once stationed in their new locations, these units tended to recruit locally and lose their original ethnic character over time, but troops were also relocated from one part of the empire to another as military needs dictated.⁶⁰ Because of this reshuffling of personnel, we find, for example, a Pannonian soldier commemorated with a funerary stela at Gordium in central Anatolia and offerings to Syrian gods in the forts of Hadrian's Wall in northern Britain.⁶¹ Some of these soldiers married local women and started families, creating new communities with ties to both the army and the local peoples. Their sons were often recruited into the Roman army a generation later. Other auxiliary veterans returned home across the frontier and played a role in mediating trade and {226} diplomatic connections between Romans and non-Romans.⁶² Recruitment from beyond the frontier fostered the growth of a distinct military society that was neither entirely Roman nor native to the lands in which it developed.

The Roman army could also be disruptive. The militarization of the frontier interfered with traditional trade routes and seasonal movements of laborers and pastoralists. Tacitus noted that unimpeded border crossing was a privilege reserved for few, such as the friendly Hermunduri tribe:

For them alone among the Germans is there trade not only on the [Danube] riverbank but even deep in the most magnificent colony of the province of Raetia. They cross here and there without guards and while to other people we show only our arms and forts, to them we have opened our homes and estates.⁶³

The *portoria*, a customs duty of 25 percent, was collected on all goods entering the empire's eastern provinces. On other frontiers the rates may have been lower, but there were still fees.⁶⁴ The eastern trade routes could be highly profitable: the record of a loan contract from Egypt documents a cargo of perfumes, ivory, fabrics, and other luxuries from India in the second century CE valued at more than 9 million sesterii.⁶⁵ (For comparison's sake, by the late second century, a fortune of 20 million sesterii could put one in the lower echelons of the imperial aristocracy.)⁶⁶ High customs fees and valuable cargoes encouraged smuggling.

The Romans began to station customs enforcers in client kingdoms beyond the frontier to help monitor the traffic.⁶⁷

Simply knowing what was going on along the frontier was a challenge in itself.⁶⁸ Surveillance posts and patrols were obtrusive shows of force, but more subtle forms of spying are hinted at by the historian Ammianus Marcellinus' mention of the *arcani*, or "hidden ones": "Their duty was, by hastening far and near, to keep our generals informed of disturbances among nearby {227} tribes."⁶⁹ A fragmentary tablet from Vindolanda, a Roman fort in northern Britain, with the text *miles arcanus* ("hidden soldier") may relate to these same spies, and another Vindolanda text possibly records a scrap of an intelligence report on the locals' fighting capabilities.⁷⁰

All this surveillance can only have been an aggravation to those who lived along the frontier. Tacitus described a Germanic tribe complaining that the Romans would not allow them to meet with their fellow Germans who lived within the borders, "or else charge us a fee to meet unarmed, practically naked, and under guard, which is even more insulting to men born to arms."⁷¹ The authority of frontier soldiers to stop, search, and tax travelers was ripe for abuse. A merchant's letter of complaint found at Vindolanda suggests some of the misconduct soldiers indulged in. The beginning of the letter is damaged, so the details are unclear, but it seems both the merchant and his goods were threatened with violence, perhaps as part of a shakedown:

he beat me further until I would either declare my goods worthless or else pour them away. . . . I beg your mercy not to allow me, an innocent man from abroad, about whose honesty you may inquire, to have been bloodied with rods like a criminal.⁷²

The letter further details how the mistreated merchant had appealed up the chain of command as far as the provincial governor with no luck.

If a merchant who could write good Latin and knew how to work the system got so little satisfaction for his grievances, the ordinary people who lived in the outer shadow of Rome's frontier cannot have fared much better. With no effective recourse against exploitation, peoples of the frontier zone resorted to raiding and revolt, such as the Frisians, who were required to pay a tribute of oxhides to Rome, even though they lived beyond the Rhine. In 28 CE the Roman centurion assigned to oversee the tribe demanded hides of higher quality than the Frisians could supply. When their appeals for relief brought no results, the Frisians revolted, killing more than a thousand Roman troops before they were subdued.⁷³

Acting both as agents of imperial power and on their own motivations, Roman soldiers made up one of the main forces at work on frontier society, {228} but Rome was not the only force along the frontier. Many other peoples, cultures, and political forces, both those local to the frontier zone and those farther away, interacted with Rome, pursuing their own agendas and putting

their own pressures on those who lived at the edges of Roman power.

Between Rome and a Hard Place

A series of inscriptions from Volubilis in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains on the Atlantic coast of North Africa records eleven occasions over the first and second centuries CE when Roman officials held negotiations with the Baquates, a collection of seminomadic tribes. To judge from the inscriptions, the negotiations seem to have come to a satisfactory end on each occasion. These inscriptions testify to the possibility of peaceful coexistence among those who lived at the fringes of the Roman world, but the fact that these negotiations had to be repeated over and over again also indicates that, in the long term, frontier relations remained unstable.⁷⁴

What was true at Volubilis was true of the frontier as a whole. While a tranquil coexistence was sometimes possible, and large-scale hostilities were relatively rare in the empire's first two and a half centuries, the frontier was never quite settled. The disquiet of the frontier arose partly from the nature of the societies along it, but also from the way it was caught between worlds. The society of the frontier was constantly being pushed and pulled by many different forces, both Roman and non-Roman. These tensions were felt both inside and outside the demarcated boundaries of Roman control. The conflict between different forces with different agendas destabilized local societies.

Many of the peoples who lived in and around the Roman frontiers are conventionally described as "tribes." This vague word is applied to various kinds of small-scale societies with no formal government that are held together by networks of extended family ties and personal relationships. Where Roman authors such as Caesar and Tacitus imagined stable ethnic groups with names and defining traits, we should instead see most of the Roman frontier zone inhabited by loose and changeable conglomerations of people who were ready to form, dissolve, and re-form alliances as their interests shifted.⁷⁵ Trying to cope with these unstable groups was a challenge for the limited resources of Roman foreign policy. The brutality in many of Rome's interactions with these peoples only sowed further disruption.

{229} There were other societies at the edges of the Roman world that were larger, more stable, and better able to deal with Rome on an equal footing, including Kush, Parthia, and Himlingøje. For much of the first few centuries of the Roman Empire, these peoples enjoyed relatively peaceful relations with Rome. Their stability and organization made it easier for them to pursue consistent long-term policies toward Rome and to rebuff Roman efforts to meddle in their spheres of influence, but the existence of smaller, less well organized states and peoples in between these major players also helped stabilize relations. Kush had ongoing conflicts with the same desert raiders that harassed the Roman southern frontier.⁷⁶ Rome and Parthia managed to keep the peace for

more than a century in part because they were able to limit their conflicts mostly to competition over influence in Armenia. Relations in the North were helped because, during the Marcomannic Wars, the rulers of Himlingøje were at war with the same peoples the Romans were fighting.⁷⁷

Caught in between these larger forces, the “tribal” peoples of the frontier did what was necessary to survive. Sometimes they were able to make a profitable peace with Rome and their other powerful neighbors. Sometimes they were pushed into open war. Much of the time, they got by in a state of uneasy cooperation, taking chances to profit from trade or military service when they could get them, indulging in petty raiding and customs evasion when they could get away with it, and suffering the abuses of bored soldiers when they had to.

Good fences may make good neighbors, but what is good for the neighbors is not always good for the fence. Earlier conceptions of the Roman frontier often imagined the peoples just beyond the Roman borders as an outer wall of client states, held in place by Roman diplomacy and intimidation as a bulwark against uncertain threats from the unknown lands of the far distance.⁷⁸ When significant new threats to the security of Roman military and political authority arose in the third century, however, they did not come from the far-off reaches of Scandinavia or central Asia but from the frontier zone itself. The peoples that Rome had been bribing, intimidating, patrolling, and generally meddling with for centuries finally began to push back in more effective ways. In the third century, peoples all around the edges of the Roman world—in Scotland, Germany, the Black Sea steppes, Arabia, and North Africa—began to succeed at what Arminius had attempted in the first decade CE: to create large, stable alliances that could stand up to Roman power.

1. Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History* 2.118; Tacitus, *Annals* 2.9.

2. Augustus, *Res Gestae* 26; Strabo, *Geography* 7.2.1.

3. Birger Storgaard, “Cosmopolitan Aristocrats,” in Jørgensen et al., *Spoils of Victory*, 106–25, esp. 110.

4. Josephus, *Life of Flavius Josephus* 46; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 56.18. Varus may be the man recorded as “Quirinus” in the Gospel of Luke 2:2.

5. Strabo 7.1.4; Velleius Paterculus 2.118–19; Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, “Tiberius” 17–18.

6. Peter S. Wells, *The Battle That Stopped Rome* (New York: Norton, 2003), 37–55.

7. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, “The Deified Augustus” 23.

8. Velleius Paterculus 2.120; Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, “Tiberius” 18–19; Peter S. Wells, *Battle*, 213–14.

9. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.88.

10. Ibid., 1.57–58.

11. Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century AD to the Third* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976).

12. Benjamin Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

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INVASIONS, MIGRATIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS

In the decade 373–383 CE, the Roman Empire faced challenges in three different frontier regions. These incidents, despite their similarities, have been remembered by historians very differently.

In 373 a revolt in the province of Africa was led by Firmus, a high-ranking officer in the Roman army and son of a king of the local Mauri people. The revolt expressed anger at high taxes and mismanagement by the provincial administration.¹ Firmus, with support from both the Mauri in the countryside and the Romanized cities nearer to the coast, proclaimed himself emperor. Roman forces sent to suppress the uprising made little progress, but the revolt ended when Firmus was betrayed by one of his own followers.

In 376 a mixed group of peoples, including those known to the Romans as Goths, begged for permission to cross the Danube and settle in Roman territory to escape violence and starvation. The desperation of these refugees is reflected in Roman accounts of some immigrants selling others as slaves to the Romans at bargain prices.² The emperor Valens admitted the followers of one Gothic leader, Fritigern, who had been friendly to Rome in the past, but others entered without permission. Over the next two years, Fritigern's followers were joined by runaway Roman slaves, disgruntled laborers, and deserters from the Roman army, as well as other immigrants including Alans and Huns. This diverse band (conventionally, though inaccurately, called “Visigoths”) had little in common besides desperation and grievances with Rome.³ They raided the countryside between Constantinople and the Danube until Valens marched out to confront them in 378. Fruitless negotiations at Adrianople gave way to a battle in which the Visigothic side defeated the Romans and killed Valens. Further negotiations followed and, unwilling to press their luck again, the band accepted a settlement that dispersed them in small groups to farmlands scattered around southeastern Europe.

{232} In 383 a Roman general in Britain, Magnus Maximus, declared himself emperor and invaded Gaul and Italy. His followers, drawn from the garrisons in Britain, were a combination of recruits from the Rhine region and local Britons.⁴ After clashing with imperial forces, Maximus negotiated a settlement that

legitimated his rule over a portion of empire stretching from Britain to North Africa. His reign lasted only a few years before further clashes with the emperor led to his defeat.

The late fourth century was a tumultuous time for the Roman Empire, and the events of 373–383 are not unique. Much of the turbulence of this period reflected discontent with the empire among peoples from frontier provinces. If we are looking for events that presage the collapse of the western empire's political structure, though, the revolts of Firmus and Maximus seem more promising than the battle at Adrianople. Firmus and Maximus both challenged imperial authority by declaring themselves emperor; Fritigern did not. Firmus and Maximus led experienced armies; Fritigern led a motley group whose victory was the result of good timing on their part and poor planning on the Romans'. Firmus' revolt threatened the breadbasket of the western empire, and Maximus' usurpation covered most of the West; Fritigern's people were dispersed to mostly marginal lands scattered around the backwaters of the eastern empire. Yet the Visigoths and Adrianople feature prominently in modern accounts of the fall of the western Roman Empire, whereas Firmus and Maximus rarely rate a mention.⁵

The presence of peoples from beyond the frontier at Adrianople (even though many of Fritigern's "Visigoths" were natives of the empire) changed how both contemporary Romans and modern historians thought about the battle and its consequences.⁶ Barbarians and the fall of the western empire seem to go together—it is hard to talk about one without bringing up the other. However, while it is true that the western empire ended and that barbarians were involved, exactly how the two are related is not so easy to define.

Barbarians and the Fall of the Roman Empire

In 200 CE large parts of Europe and the greater Mediterranean region were under the control of an imperial regime centered on the city of Rome. By 500, western Europe and the western Mediterranean were divided into a patchwork of states ruled by kings and warlords who called themselves neither emperors nor Romans. Parts of southeastern Europe, Anatolia, the Levant, {233} and Egypt remained under the control of a Roman emperor, but the state he ruled was politically, culturally, linguistically, and religiously different from the Roman Empire of three centuries before.

The sixth-century Byzantine historian Zosimus was the first to seriously tackle the question of the failure of the Roman state.⁷ Zosimus, a pagan in Christian times, believed the answer lay in the abandonment of traditional religion—not out of attachment to the old gods, but from the conviction that the change had undermined the perception of Roman power. The stability of the empire had depended on the belief, both by its subjects and its enemies, that it *was* stable. When something so fundamental as the state religion could change, Zosimus

argued, that belief was shaken in ways that could not be repaired.⁸

Not everyone who lived between 200 and 500 agreed with Zosimus' diagnosis, but many expressed a sense of disorder and decline. Bad emperors and military failures occupied some writers. Others bemoaned the collapse of social order and moral standards. Some believed they were witnessing the end of the empire; others, the end of the world.⁹ In the 250s Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, wrote: "No one should be amazed that everything in the world is beginning to fail, since the world itself is already failing and near its end."¹⁰ Two centuries later, Hydatius, a bishop in northwestern Iberia, wrote a chronicle of wars, disasters, and the collapse of Rome, with the same confidence that the end was at hand.¹¹ Some writers were more positive. Individual emperors were praised by their supporters. Military victories and diplomatic successes, periods of restored order, and great accomplishments were all duly noted. Christians rejoiced as their faith became first legally tolerated, then the official state religion. Still, these bright spots stood against a dark background. Emperors were praised less for their accomplishments than for curtailing violence and abuse. Military victories were celebrated as exceptions, not the rule. The triumph of Christianity was understood as part of a divine plan that led to the end of this world and the coming of a better one.

Attitudes toward peoples beyond the frontiers also changed. While there were still, as always, many different ways of thinking about barbarians, late Roman writers stressed the threat that they posed to civilized order. Despite {234} the Roman tradition of openness to outsiders, Roman culture had also always contained a strain of nativist snobbery. From the third century on, this exclusionary tendency became more pronounced.¹² The optimistic view that it was Rome's destiny to conquer ever farther and bring the whole world under its civilizing influence largely vanished from Roman literature. People whose Gaulish or Pannonian ancestors had found their place in Roman society became more resistant to allowing Franks and Goths to do the same.

Writers developed a set of tropes to give color to their texts: barbarians invaded and pillaged; they were disorganized and wild, almost bestial; their numbers were enormous, and they fought ferociously, but they could be beaten by Roman courage and discipline.¹³ These literary barbarians were rarely imbued with purpose or agency but were pictured as forces of nature, like a flooded river bursting its banks. Similar imagery was applied to agitation in the cities and rural unrest, banditry, undisciplined soldiers, even overzealous monks.¹⁴

Like other literary tropes, the "barbarian" image was subject to reinterpretation. The Christian writer Orosius argued that barbarian invasions were ultimately good because they drove people to seek the comfort of faith. Saint Augustine held up the self-restraint of the Goths, who sacked Rome but left unharmed those who took refuge in churches, to shame his fellow Christians with the example of barbarians who behaved better than Romans.¹⁵ The "barbarian" was such a well-worn trope that Christians and pagans used it to snipe at one another. "Who is so much like a barbarian as not to feel the need for

the altar of Victory?" protested the pagan senator Symmachus in the late 300s when traditional rites were being suppressed.¹⁶ The Christian poet Prudentius shot back: "Let those be the gods of barbarian bumpkins. . . . It is disgraceful and wretched that in clinging to that superstition you think in the manner of monstrous peoples with savage ways."¹⁷

It is easy to make too much of these gloomy sources. In every age, there were pessimistic Romans certain that everything was getting worse.¹⁸ Unlike earlier emperors who had made a show of denying their autocracy, the later {235} emperors emphasized their own power and status. Their propagandists accordingly played up the severity of the crises an emperor had faced and cast aspersions on his rivals. Christians were inclined to magnify the ordinary troubles of their times into signs of a coming apocalypse.¹⁹ Just because the late Roman sources are full of rampaging barbarians does not mean that barbarian rampages were actually a common occurrence. The barbarians of late Roman literature bear little relation to the real peoples who lived around Rome's frontier. Nevertheless, between 200 and 500, relationships between the Roman state and the peoples who lived on and around its frontiers were changing. The image of barbarian menace in late Roman literature is a symptom of the anxieties that came with changing times.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Western scholarship looked to late Roman literature in search of a straightforward narrative of population movements. Roman accounts of barbarians and their wanderings were understood as charting the trajectories of discrete and coherent ethnic groups who could be identified with modern nations and ethnic groups. Archaeological traces of the distribution of different object types were believed to mark out likewise coherent cultures that could be connected with peoples named in the literary sources. By stringing together references in Roman literature and the distribution of artifacts across Europe, historians believed they could trace the migrations of whole peoples from primordial homelands—generally in Scandinavia or around the Baltic Sea—through the rest of Europe. The resulting maps, with their long, colorful arrows snaking unbroken across the continent, gave visual form to contemporary ideology: the decadent Romans had been swept away before the flood of pure Germanic tribes from the "Aryan" homeland.²⁰

Scholars in the late twentieth century, reacting both to the racially charged nationalism of the nineteenth century and to its horrifying consequences in the mid-twentieth, rejected the idea of coherent ethnic groups flooding across the frontier to destroy the Roman Empire. The work of anthropologists on the formation of group identities showed that ethnicities are far more fluid than nineteenth-century nationalists believed. When Roman authors assigned names and identities to groups on the frontier, they were dependent on unreliable, outdated literary traditions that had little connection to the realities of frontier societies. Critical reexamination of the archaeological {236} evidence cast further doubts on the "barbarian invasion" model. The premise that people who wore the

same types of jewelry and buried their dead in similar styles must have formed a cohesive ethnic unit was discarded. With it went the belief that the peoples who emerged onto the Roman frontier in the third century could be traced back to primordial origins centuries or millennia earlier and forward to the foundation of modern nations. Historical thinking turned so decisively against the invasion model in the late twentieth century that some scholars began to argue that hardly anyone went anywhere in the late Roman period.²¹

Since the late twentieth century, the pendulum has begun to swing back, and the idea of barbarian invasions has been reconsidered more seriously. As with many such debates, historians are working toward a middle ground between earlier extremes. It is now generally agreed that groups of people who can be at least tentatively identified with some of the names used by Roman authors existed on the Roman frontiers and played some role in the collapse of Roman political power in the West. As Guy Halsall has put it, scholarly opinion is now divided between “Movers,” who think that the migrations of people from the frontiers into Roman territory were the prime cause of the breakdown of the western empire, and “Shakers,” who think that Roman power collapsed for internal reasons and that small numbers of people from the frontiers were drawn in as a result.²²

Crisis, Recovery, and Change

The transformations of the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries were shaped by the troubles of the third. In 235 the emperor Severus Alexander was assassinated by his own troops, who were unhappy with his handling of affairs on the Danubian frontier.²³ The soldiers’ chosen replacement, Maximinus, was an army officer from Thrace or Moesia.²⁴ Maximinus held onto power for three years of vigorous frontier campaigning, but in 238 a provincial revolt in Africa escalated into a civil war. Maximinus was killed by his own troops as he fought rival claimants to the imperial title.²⁵

For the next five decades, the Roman world was repeatedly plunged into civil war as contenders for the throne sprang up on all sides, most of {237} them frontier generals backed by their troops. The most successful of these soldier-emperors were able to secure relative calm for a few years, but many managed only a few months or even weeks in power before being assassinated, sometimes by the very troops who had backed them in the first place. It was rare that an emperor lasted long enough to die of natural causes—usually epidemic disease, of which there was a serious outbreak in the Mediterranean between 250 and 270.²⁶ Lasting stability did not return to the Roman world until the accession of Diocletian, an Illyrian soldier who had risen up through the ranks, in 284.

The effects of this long period of violence, disease, and instability on the Roman world were far-reaching. Every fresh emperor had to find the money to pay off his soldiers if he did not want to end up on their sword points himself.

When ransacking the provinces for cash and precious metals did not yield enough coin, the emperors began stretching their supply of bullion by minting coins that contained only nominal amounts of silver and gold mixed with copper alloys. In itself, this practice was not new. As early as the first century CE, Roman coins were issued with less precious metal than their face value.²⁷ By the beginning of the third century, Roman coins were to some extent a fiat currency, like modern paper money, sustained less by their metal content than by confidence in the state that issued them. When that confidence evaporated, the new coins had so little intrinsic value that inflation jumped to rates of between 5,000 and 7,000 percent. These stresses fractured the Roman economy and crippled long-distance trade.²⁸

Cities shrank as disease and the breakdown of trade networks drove many people to seek livelihoods in the countryside. With the army distracted by civil wars, provincial landowners turned to private military forces for their security. Rural estates shifted away from cash crops to subsistence farming. Without a functioning government to maintain patronage networks and reward the loyalty of provincial aristocrats, the prestige value of being connected to Rome diminished in comparison with the practical value of being able to maintain a following of farmers and warriors.

These effects were not felt equally throughout the empire. Gaul and Italy experienced some of the greatest economic trouble, while North Africa and {238} Syria remained relatively prosperous.²⁹ Political unrest affected the urban centers of power more than the countryside, while the breakdown of military order exposed rural areas to widespread looting, both by Roman soldiers and by raiders from across the undermanned frontiers. The disparate effects of the third century's troubles further weakened the cohesion of the empire. Between 260 and 274, the provinces of Gaul and Britain broke off into the autonomous Gallic Empire under their own emperors and Senate. In the 270s the Syrian frontier city of Palmyra took over Syria, Arabia Petraea, Egypt, and parts of Anatolia as its own empire. Although both of these breakaway states were later reconquered, they demonstrated the viability of smaller, more regionally coherent power structures.³⁰

After coming to power in 284 and restoring a measure of stability, Diocletian enacted a number of reforms. He divided the empire into eastern and western halves, each of which was to have its own administration with a senior and a junior emperor. He also reorganized the empire into new provinces with regional subdivisions. He separated military and civilian administration and made changes to army supply, replacing some taxation in cash with deliveries of goods directly from provincial farms to local forts. These reforms addressed some short-term problems, but they also encouraged many of the long-term trends toward political fragmentation and local self-reliance that had developed during the third century.

Diocletian reigned until 305 when he and his fellow emperors managed a smooth transition of power. The goal was to establish a pattern of succession that

could ensure continuity from senior to junior emperors, but the system broke down in 306 with a resurgence of civil war. The winner of this round was Constantine, who furthered some of Diocletian's decentralizing reforms, in addition to legalizing Christianity and establishing his court at the old Greek city of Byzantium, now renamed Constantinople.

The societies of the frontiers were as deeply affected by Rome's crises as the empire itself. Rome's troubles upset diplomatic relationships and cut off trade routes. With the army fighting itself, some pressure was relieved on the peoples whom frontier forces normally monitored and exploited. Increased dependence on private defense opened new opportunities for warriors from outside the empire to find employment inside it. At the same time, this half century of turmoil struck the Roman Empire at a moment when societies around the edges of the empire were beginning to create larger, more stable political entities that were able to confront Roman power more effectively.

{239} The Arabs: Between Rome and Persia

The changes that happened in societies along the Roman frontier from the third century on are best documented at Rome's eastern edge. Events there provide a useful model for the rest of the frontier.

In 224 CE an internal power struggle in the Parthian Empire led to the fall of the Parthian kings and the rise of a new ruling dynasty, the Sasanians, who took over control of the empire. The Sasanian kings instituted a stronger central monarchy that was able to command resources and organize military operations more effectively. Sasanian Persia looked westward and began to put pressure on the Roman frontier.³¹

Numerous peoples, some settled, others nomadic, inhabited the regions between Rome and Persia, generally referred to by the Romans as "Saracens" or "Arabs." Some, such as the Nabataeans, whose kingdom had been incorporated into the Roman Empire by Trajan, were allied with one of the great powers, but there were others who owed allegiance to neither. The Sasanians' more aggressive stance on their western frontier disrupted existing relationships and forced the peoples of the frontier zone to adapt to new pressures.³²

A string of trading cities stood on the major routes between Rome and Persia, including Hatra, Dura-Europus, and Palmyra. These cities provided protection and facilities for trade caravans, operated patrols to keep the roads safe, and managed diplomatic relations with the various peoples of the region. Hatra was a semi-autonomous city under nominal Persian suzerainty. Palmyra and Dura-Europus were under Roman rule. In their westward push, the Sasanians destroyed Hatra in 241 and Dura-Europus in 257.

In the 250s, as pressure from Persia mounted and Rome was mired in internal problems, Palmyra began to act with greater independence. A Palmyrene magnate named Odaenathus rose to prominence as part of the Roman

administration in the region. Inscriptions from Palmyra describe him both as lord of the city and as a *vir clarissimus* of consular rank, one of the highest titles in the Roman aristocracy.³³ Sources suggest Odaenathus also made overtures toward an alliance with Persia, but he was rebuffed.³⁴ In 260, after the Sasanians captured the emperor Valerian and his entire army in a stunning victory, Odaenathus took the title of king and assumed control of Roman forces in the East. While remaining technically a vassal state of Rome, Palmyra became effectively an independent kingdom, carrying on its own military operations against Persia.³⁵



{240} Two sides of a Palmyrene coin with a portrait of the Roman emperor Aurelian on one face (left) and the young Palmyrene ruler Vaballathus on the other (right).

{240} After Odaenathus' death in 260, power passed to his wife, Zenobia, who ruled as regent for their son, Vaballathus. Zenobia continued Palmyra's expansion as a de facto independent state, launching conquests that stretched from Egypt to central Anatolia, while at the same time maintaining a public show of loyalty to Rome, including minting coins that portrayed Vaballathus on one side and the emperor Aurelian on the other.³⁶ Aurelian, however, was moving to bring Palmyra to heel. In 271, seeing that the show of loyalty was no longer adequate, Zenobia declared independence, claiming the Roman titles of emperor for her son and empress for herself. The next year, Aurelian besieged Palmyra and forced a surrender, but Palmyra rebelled again in 273. Aurelian assaulted the city and this time razed it to the ground.³⁷

The destruction of Hatra, Dura-Europus, and Palmyra seriously disrupted the political and economic stability of the region. Smaller tribal groups and nomadic bands who had looked to those cities for protection, patronage, and leadership were left disorganized and unprotected. Without the efforts these cities had made to secure the trade routes and deter brigandage, trade faltered and raiding increased.³⁸ Under these conditions, local peoples banded together to try to assert control over their own regions and negotiate their relationships with Rome and Persia. Intertribal alliances had already begun to develop in the late second

century, bringing several different peoples together {241} under the name of Tanukhids. Other alliances developed later, including the Lakhmids and Ghassanids. These alliances grew stronger and more important in the power vacuum left by the Roman-Sasanian wars.³⁹

These alliances had complicated relationships to both Rome and Persia. Tanukhid soldiers served in the Roman army in the late third century and fought in the siege of Palmyra.⁴⁰ In 378 the Tanukhid queen Mavia led a revolt against Rome, but, after resolving the conflict, she later contributed forces to the defense of the Roman Empire against Gothic raiders.⁴¹ One of the early kings of the Lakhmids, Imru'ulqais, is recorded as a Sasanian ally early in his career when he was granted the rule over the Arabs living in the Sasanian Empire.⁴² At some point he switched sides, because his gravestone, dated 328, hailed him as "King of all Arabs" and a client of Rome, with numerous tribal leaders under him.⁴³ Much of the Lakhmid coalition, however, remained under Persian authority, and an inscription from around 300 records a different king of the Lakhmids who declared fealty to the Sasanian king.⁴⁴ By the later fourth century, the Lakhmids were securely allied to Persia and caused much trouble for the Romans by raiding their frontier, until the Byzantine emperors in the mid-sixth century opposed them with their own clients, the Ghassanids.⁴⁵

The Sasanian kings aligned themselves closely with Zoroastrianism in the later third century. In the fourth century, the Roman emperors did the same with Christianity. Wars between the Sasanians and the Romans in these centuries were often accompanied by persecutions—in Persia of Christians, in Rome of Manichaeans, who were perceived as following a Persian cult.⁴⁶ The Arabs also had to negotiate these pressures as they managed their relationships with the two empires. The Tanukhids became Christian along with their Roman patrons, but they also asserted a religious independence: when Mavia led the Tanukhids in revolt, it was to secure the appointment of a local monk as their bishop rather than the candidate favored by Constantinople.⁴⁷ The Lakhmid king Imru'ulqais, who switched sides from Persia to Rome, also {242} converted to Christianity, but the Lakhmid kings in Persia continued to follow their ancestral religion.⁴⁸

The case of the Arabs shows how difficult it could be for small peoples to live in the shadow of empires. The Romans and Persians used their Arab allies as proxies for small-scale frontier fighting without regard to the Arabs' own interests. As the Lakhmid king Alamoudaros noted in his complaints about the border warfare between his people and the Ghassanids in the sixth century, the treaties between Rome and Persia never mentioned the Arabs.⁴⁹ The history of the region shows the slow process by which frontier peoples worked their way toward a more effective position for dealing with their powerful neighbors, including the Nabataeans' alliance with Rome, the Palmyrene attempt to copy Roman imperial structures, the creation of intertribal coalitions such as the Tanukhids, Lakhmids, and Ghassanids, and the cultivation of political and cultural connections with Rome and Persia. Along with these developments went the gradual creation of a collective sense of ethnic identity through cross-tribal

institutions, real and fictive kinship ties, and shared religious and literary traditions.⁵⁰

In the seventh century, these accumulating processes came to fruition with the foundation of Islam, a new identity that was neither Roman nor Persian, neither Christian nor Zoroastrian. United under Islam, the Arabs were finally able to face the empires on an equal footing. The emergence of a powerful, well-organized, and culturally unified new society on the southeastern frontier seemed sudden and inexplicable from a Roman point of view, but it was the product of a long period of experimentation and adaptation under the pressure of imperial frontiers.⁵¹

Frontier Alliances

Developments on Rome's eastern frontier had parallels in the north and south. Both in Europe and Africa, the peoples of the frontier had long been caught between the Romans and other forces, even though these forces do not appear in the Roman sources with the clarity of Sasanian Persia. In the north, the power center at Himlingøje continued to expand the reach of its trading and diplomatic network over an area that reached central Germany and the northern shores of the Black Sea.⁵² In the south, Kush remained a major power in the Nile valley through the mid-fourth century, while the Garamantes established a flourishing kingdom based on desert agriculture {243} and trade in the northern Sahara.⁵³ Like the Sasanians, who were able to reach a relatively stable relationship with Rome by shifting many of their conflicts onto the peoples who lived between them, the major powers to the north and south also benefited from the buffer of smaller societies that separated them from Rome.⁵⁴

Over time, the peoples of the frontier built larger, more resilient alliances to resist the pressures that came from both sides. Some of these peoples left records of their own, but we know most of them only through Roman sources. Late Roman authors listed more than a hundred peoples along or beyond the frontiers. Not all these lists are reliable, but many peoples who would go on to play significant roles in later history first become visible to us in Roman sources. In the north, these include the Picts in Scotland, Saxons and Angles on the North Sea coast, Franks and Alamanni on the Rhine, and Juthungi, Vandals, and Goths along the Danube. To the east there were Alans, Avars, and later Huns on the steppes, while Arabs were in the eastern desert fringe. In Africa there were Blemmyes and Noubades along the Nile valley, Austuriani in Cyrenaica, and various divisions of the Mauri in western North Africa.⁵⁵

Some of these names reference an alliance or evoke common values around which people of different backgrounds could rally, such as the Alamanni, "All people," the Franks, "Brave ones," or the Juthungi, "Young warriors."⁵⁶ Some were even more explicit, such as the Quinquegentanei, or "Five tribes," of the Mauri.⁵⁷ Others, such as the Goths, Blemmyes, or Noubades, were old tribal

names reinterpreted as broad collective names that could apply to people of different origins.⁵⁸ Some of these societies reflect their assembly {244} from smaller groups in other ways. The Austuriani of North Africa practiced both nomadic and settled agricultural traditions, suggesting they were formed from peoples with two different ways of life.⁵⁹ The Picts practiced matrilineal royal succession, in which kingship passed not from father to son but from brother to brother or uncle to nephew, diffusing power among elite families with no single line monopolizing the position.⁶⁰ Several of the Germanic-speaking peoples practiced joint kingship in which multiple rulers governed collectively.⁶¹

These alliances took shape in contact with the Roman world and were interconnected with it. Individuals combined identities, like the soldier who identified himself as both a Frank and a Roman in his grave inscription, or the Visigothic king Theodoric who was hailed as “spreader of the Roman name” in a celebratory inscription.⁶² Large numbers of Franks served in the Roman army, and members of the Frankish elite ascended to the highest ranks of Roman military administration.⁶³ Goths are first attested in an inscription recording a unit of auxiliary soldiers at a Roman fortress on the Arab frontier in 208.⁶⁴ Even when these groups remained beyond the frontier, their relationships with the Romans could be complicated, like that of the Alamanni who, in the mid-300s, were invited by the emperor Constantius to raid the Rhine frontier in order to distract his rival in a civil war.⁶⁵

Many frontier groups adopted elements of Roman culture as part of their own self-expression, in much the same way that Romans had earlier adopted Greek culture as a way of expressing their own identity. Paccius Maximus, a Roman officer stationed on the Egyptian frontier who may have been a local recruit, left a couple poems of his own composition inscribed on the walls of a temple to the Nubian sun god Mandulis at Kalabsha. These poems, written in Greek, place Mandulis in the company of both Isis and the Greek gods of Mount Olympus.⁶⁶ From the fourth century on, as Christianity became established as a Roman religion, peoples on the frontier responded, often {245} finding their own local ways of adopting Christianity that connected them to Rome while still marking them as different. The Arian form of Christianity, which was condemned as a heresy by the Roman elite (based on the teachings of Arius, a third-century African ascetic, not connected with the mythical “Aryan” people), had many adherents in North Africa and was widely adopted in northern Europe.⁶⁷

Invoking connections with Rome was a useful way for frontier leaders to display their power, even when those connections were tenuous or nonexistent. Another Greek inscription at Kalabsha from the fifth century, celebrating the victory of King Silko of the Noubades over the Blemmyes, calls Silko a “basiliskos” or subking, implying a nominal fealty to the Roman emperor. The accompanying image shows Silko in Roman armor.⁶⁸ In fourth-century western North Africa, Roman military titles such as “tribune” were adopted by local landowners who commanded their own military forces.⁶⁹ Some peoples adapted their own historical narratives to Roman models. When Jordanes, a sixth-century

eastern Roman historian of Gothic descent, wrote a history of the Goths, he rejected any material from Gothic oral tradition and depended solely on Roman sources.⁷⁰ By the seventh century, the Franks had recast their own history to claim descent from the Trojans via an invented character named “Francus,” much as the Romans had once laid claim to Aeneas.⁷¹

The peoples of the frontiers created their alliances to better pursue their own interests in the spaces between empires. Sometimes that meant raiding the provinces or fighting wars, but often the most productive results came through trade, diplomacy, and collaboration with Romans. At the same time, the people of the Roman Empire were negotiating their own interests with a government that did not always respond to them. Between the third and sixth centuries, people of many different origins in and around the Roman Empire were engaged in the same project of concentrating power at the local level and promoting their own interests, sometimes in accord with the imperial elite and sometimes at their expense.

Barbarian Invasions

The century from the late 300s to the late 400s was a time of crises and reorganization in the Roman world. The “barbarian” peoples who had been taking shape around the Roman frontier in previous centuries were involved in the troubles of this time, but many of the problems that beset the empire were internal: provincial revolts, factional struggles, military usurpations, and social upheavals. Barbarians sometimes threatened parts of the empire or took over control of territory, but their activities were wrapped up in the larger turmoil of Roman society.⁷²

We may see how barbarians interacted with late Roman society by following the fortunes of the Visigoths after Adrianople. As part of the agreement they made after the battle, they pledged to provide troops for the Roman army when needed, which they did for civil wars in 387 and 392. On both occasions, the Visigothic troops suffered serious casualties and felt that their Roman commanders saw them as expendable.

Anti-Gothic prejudice was strong among Romans. Orosius, writing about the death of thousands of Gothic troops in 394, said: “the loss of them was a gain [for Rome] and their defeat a victory.”⁷³ At the same time, Romans were vague about who counted as a “Goth.” The term was widely applied to those who came from beyond the empire’s northeastern borders, but it could also include, as in the Visigoths’ case, slaves, deserters, the rural poor, and other undesirables within the empire. Most of the “Goths” that Romans had contact with were auxiliary soldiers, but given the way troops moved around the empire and filled up their ranks with local recruits, most “Gothic” units probably included a mixed bag of immigrants and lower-class provincials.⁷⁴ Roman hostility did not make fine distinctions. A Roman general on the eastern frontier, on receiving the news of

the Visigoths' victory at Adrianople, had all of his Gothic troops murdered.⁷⁵ In this climate of animosity, another group of Gothic veterans who had been settled in Anatolia rebelled in 399. {247} The rebels captured Constantinople before the population of the city turned on them and massacred them.

The Visigoths' resentment boiled over into revolt. In 395 they banded together again and chose Alaric, who had led their troops under Roman command, as their leader. Unable to win concessions from the imperial government in Constantinople, Alaric took his forces into Italy in 402 to try to wrest a better deal from the western administration.

The western empire had troubles of its own. Multiple attempted usurpers had arisen in the late 300s, and in 395 there was another revolt in Africa. In 406 a group of Alans, Vandals, and Suebi crossed the Rhine into Gaul. Roman forces, already stretched thin by civil war, were unable to mount an effective response. A series of usurpers then seized power in Britain, the last of whom invaded Gaul. Since the western emperor was the eleven-year-old Honorius, real power in the West was wielded by his regent, the general Stilicho, son of a Vandal officer in the Roman army. Stilicho's enemies at court blamed him for the crises and had him executed in 408. After Stilicho's death, there was an outburst of violence against the families of soldiers who been recruited from the frontier zone and settled in Italy. Many of these soldiers fled Italy and joined up with Alaric. Stripped of Stilicho's leadership and his soldiers' loyalty, Italy was now defenseless.

In 408 Alaric's forces besieged Rome until they were bought off with a large payment. Alaric continued to negotiate with Honorius, demanding land and food for his followers. In 410, with negotiations stalled, the Visigoths besieged Rome again and sacked the city. It is hard to estimate the real effects of the sack of Rome. The imperial court had long since moved to Ravenna in northern Italy, and much of the city's practical importance as a political and economic center had already faded away. Still, the psychological impact was extreme, and contemporary accounts indicate that refugees fleeing Italy spread as far as North Africa and Palestine.⁷⁶

Alaric died shortly after the siege, and rule passed to his brother-in-law Ataulf. Under Ataulf, the Visigoths moved into Gaul while continuing to negotiate with Honorius. Their bargaining position was strengthened by the fact that they had captured the emperor's sister, Galla Placidia, in Rome, but Honorius still refused their demands. In Gaul, Ataulf also attempted to negotiate with Jovinus, a usurper who had proclaimed himself emperor, but Jovinus was not responsive to the Visigoths' demands, either. Honorius and Ataulf then forged an alliance against Jovinus, and the Visigoths dealt with the usurper. This action improved relations enough that Honorius recognized the Visigoths as Roman allies, and Ataulf and Galla Placidia were married.

The Alans, Vandals, and Suebi, who had raided their way through Gaul and occupied parts of the Iberian Peninsula, provided another opportunity {248} for collaboration. Honorius agreed to grant the Visigoths land in return for dealing with the invaders. After several years of campaigning, the Visigoths finally

received their land settlement in southeastern Gaul in 419.⁷⁷ Over the following generations, the Visigoths retained a nominal fealty to Rome while largely acting in their own interest.

In the 430s and 440s, one frontier threat above all concerned both halves of the empire: the Huns. Like many frontier peoples, the Huns were a coalition of smaller groups, many of them only loosely tied to Hunnish leadership.⁷⁸ This broad coalition allowed the Huns to marshal resources on a much greater scale than most frontier peoples and, like Persia or Himlingøje, deal with Rome on a near equal footing. Since at least the 380s, some Hunnish groups had served as Roman auxiliaries while others had raided the frontiers of the eastern empire, but Constantinople had largely been able to deal with them diplomatically.

In 434 an aggressive and charismatic new Hunnish leader, Attila, rose to power. Attila both expanded the coalition and put more pressure on the eastern empire. Eventually, the eastern emperors were forced to buy off the Huns. Attila then turned his attention to the western empire. The Visigoths, along with the Franks and Burgundians, contributed troops to the Roman army that confronted Attila in eastern Gaul in 451. While the Romans and their allies did not score a decisive victory, they resisted the Huns strongly enough to send them into retreat. After Attila's death in 453, the Hunnish confederation disintegrated in internal power struggles.

Over the fifth century, the Visigoths continued to expand their control in the West and eventually built a kingdom that stretched from central Gaul to the Strait of Gibraltar. Until 475, the Visigothic kings officially ruled as delegates of the western emperor, but in that year King Euric negotiated with the largely powerless western emperor for official recognition as an independent state.

The history of the Visigoths presents many of the kinds of interactions that Romans and barbarians had with one another during this period. The century from Adrianople to the recognition of the Visigothic kingdom was one of turmoil and conflict, but the barbarians were not the only or even the primary {249} instigators of those troubles. Sometimes threats emerged from the frontiers, such as the Alans, Vandals, and Suebi in 406 or the Huns in the mid-fifth century, but more often the Romans were concerned with internal factional struggles, usurpations, and provincial revolts. When barbarian peoples got involved in such affairs, they often stood with the imperial state, not against it, and they tended to stick to the alliances they made unless badly treated. Despite the suspicions voiced by some Romans, barbarians who allied with Rome were no less reliable or effective than Roman forces.⁷⁹

The traditional maps that trace out the routes of migrating barbarians imply that the rest of the Roman world was stable, but Romans were moving, too. People had always moved around the empire. The late Roman population of York, in northern Britain, included people from Italy, Gaul, Egypt, and North Africa. Archaeologists estimate as many as 20 percent of those buried in the city's late Roman cemeteries were born outside the British Isles.⁸⁰ Soldiers were shuffled from frontier to frontier, followed by their families. Merchants traveled

from the core of the empire to its fringes, and the varying economic fortunes of different regions drew people from one province to another. In the unsettled times from the third century on, new patterns of movement developed. Large numbers of people migrated from the cities into the countryside fleeing disease and seeking economic security. There was a widespread shift of population toward the eastern and southern parts of the Mediterranean where local economies were faring better.⁸¹ Short-term disturbances such as the Visigoths' attack on Rome sent waves of refugees to resettle elsewhere, with the resulting destabilizing effects on the local economies where they ended up causing further ripples of movement. On a more accurate map, the arrows tracing barbarian migrations would be lost amid the arrows marking other relocations.

Since the crises of the third century, many people had been looking for more reliable local defense. Warriors from the frontier regions met much of the new demand for mercenaries that came from landowners looking to secure their estates. In time, the lines between landlords and warlords became blurred as leaders from the frontier regions with their own warrior followings settled into the role of local magnates.⁸² As imperial control broke down throughout the western empire, people looked for leadership at the local level. In some places, local leaders still identified with Rome, such as the Gaulish aristocrats who began to convene councils in 418 to discuss matters of common concern. In other places, the most effective local leadership came from recent immigrants or Roman allies such as the Visigoths in southern Gaul. In some places, the identity of the new leadership is less easy to define, such as in the mountains of Mauretania where native kings reasserted local authority, but still set up Latin inscriptions in which they claimed Roman imperial titles.⁸³

Peoples of the frontier participated in and reacted to the changes and challenges of the late Roman period in much the same way that the Romans around them did. They formed local alliances to protect their interests and rallied around successful leaders, just like the provincial Romans who revolted against imperial control or threw their lot in with usurpers. They were as much part of the Roman world as anyone else.

Romans and Barbarians

In 500, over most of Western Europe and the Mediterranean, Rome was only a name. An array of small Anglo-Saxon kingdoms filled the eastern parts of Britain. The Frankish kingdom occupied most of northern Gaul, while the Visigoths controlled southwestern Gaul and much of the Iberian Peninsula. Southeastern Gaul was ruled by the Burgundians. Italy and Dalmatia were under Ostrogothic rule. Much of the North African coast was controlled by the Vandals, while Mauri kingdoms occupied the interior and western mountains. This was not the end of Rome. The empire would carry on in the East and even have a brief western resurgence, but as a unified political entity centered on Italy and

controlling the Mediterranean and large parts of Europe, the Roman Empire was over. We may be moved to wonder why Rome failed and barbarians succeeded, but the more pertinent question is: why did those who succeeded at controlling political power across Western Europe no longer identify themselves as Romans?

Most of the peoples who played a role in the history of this age were not strangers to Roman culture. They largely came from the frontier zone and had had centuries of contact with the Roman world. By the time a unified Frankish kingdom was formed in northern Gaul in the 480s, Frankish soldiers had been serving in the Roman army for more than two hundred years. Many of the people conventionally called “Goths” were Roman allies or veterans who had been settled on land within the empire. Many important Roman generals of the period, such as Stilicho in the West or Aspar in the East, were second-generation Romans, the descendants of frontier leaders who had served the empire.⁸⁴ Since the early days of the republic, Rome had flourished by bringing people like these into its society, incorporating them into its fabric, and accepting them as Romans. Most of the later empire’s soldiers came from frontier provinces. So did most of the emperors. This tradition of openness and incorporation began to falter in the third century.

Military recruitment from the frontier had been one of the main channels for integrating outsiders into the Roman state, but this channel was interrupted by Diocletian’s reforms. Though intended to help stabilize the Roman military in a period of crisis, the separation of military and civilian administration had the effect of creating two independent aristocracies. While the civil aristocracy drew from an elite already well integrated into Roman society, the military aristocracy filled up with immigrants. The patronage and social connections that had traditionally brought frontier leaders into contact with broader Roman society were cut off. Popular and literary culture came to emphasize the menace of barbarians both inside and out. People born in the empire who served Rome all their lives were not called Romans. The word “barbarian” itself could be used simply to mean “soldier.”⁸⁵ Open hostility toward those who served Rome can be seen in incidents such as the assassination of Stilicho and the attacks on his soldiers and their families.

These divisions continued to widen in the fourth and fifth centuries, even though the new immigrants adopted features of Roman culture in much the same way that earlier generations of Rome’s subjects had done. Most of them accepted the Roman religion—now Christianity—and began to speak local versions of Latin. They married into the families of the ruling elite and preserved many of the structures of provincial administration.⁸⁶ While in some places, such as Britain and North Africa, the new rulers faced resistance from native peoples who still identified with Rome, across much of Western Europe, the integration of frontier peoples into local social, economic, and political structures proceeded relatively smoothly.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the elite refused to see the newcomers as Romans or their arrival as anything other than a disaster. Factional conflicts and outbursts of anti-immigrant violence suggest that this hostile attitude was not

limited to the upper class.

The letters of Sidonius Apollinaris, a fifth-century aristocrat and bishop in southern Gaul, reflect the divide that the established elite kept between themselves and the new rulers. Writing in 474 of the negotiations surrounding the recognition of an independent Visigothic kingdom, he praised his fellow Gauls by asserting their common Trojan ancestry with the Romans and prayed that {252} they would not fall into the hands of the barbarian Visigoths.⁸⁸ When his city became part of the Visigothic kingdom, Sidonius was shrewd enough to find kind words for Euric. He hailed the king's strength as a defender of Romans against even more dreadful barbarians, such as Saxons and Huns.⁸⁹ Even so, he could not bring himself to call Euric a Roman.⁹⁰ The Visigoths had come to Gaul not as conquerors but as allies of the Roman emperor against usurpers and invaders, and by Euric's day, they had lived in Gaul for more than half a century, but their neighbors still called them barbarians. If the Visigoths chose not to call themselves Romans, it may have been less because they did not value Roman culture than because they had endured a century of hostility and violence from those who claimed that status for themselves.

The Romans were hardly the first or the last people in history to respond to times of stress and change by turning inward, seeking reassurance in a strengthened sense of identity by excluding and scapegoating those who were different. There were many forces, some internal and some external, that pushed the Roman Empire to break down into smaller states, but by hardening the lines between insiders and outsiders, the Romans of the late empire sacrificed one of the strongest forces holding the state together. Zosimus may have been mistaken to blame Christianity for the empire's troubles, but he was not entirely wrong in arguing that the Roman Empire fell because traditional Roman ideals were undermined.

1. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* 29.5; Zosimus, *New History* 4.16.

2. Ammianus Marcellinus 31.4; Zosimus 4.20.

3. Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain, 409–711* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 22–24; James, *Europe's Barbarians*, 102–28.

4. Brian Dobson and J. C. Mann, "The Roman Army and Britain and Britons in the Roman Army," *Britannia* 4 (1973): 191–205.

5. James, *Europe's Barbarians*, 52–53.

6. Noel Lenski, "Initium Mali Romano Imperio: Contemporary Reactions to the Battle of Adrianople," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 127 (1997): 162–63.

7. Walter Goffart, "Zosimus, the First Historian of Rome's Fall," *Historia* 76, no. 2 (April 1971): 412–41.

8. Zosimus 1.57, 2.7, 4.59.

9. Goffart, "Zosimus"; Géza Alföldi, "The Crisis of the Third Century as Seen by Contemporaries," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 15, no. 1 (1974): 89–111; Edward Watts, "John Rufus, Timothy Aelurus, and the Fall of the Western Roman Empire," in *Romans*,

- Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (London: Routledge, 2011), 97–106.
10. Cyprian, *To Demetrianus* 4.
 11. Hydatius, *Chronicle* 7.
 12. James, *Europe's Barbarians*, 36.
 13. For variations on these themes, see, for instance, Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 77.14; Herodian, *Roman History* 7.3; *Panegyrici Latini* 6.12; Prudentius, *Against Symmachus* 2.807–19; Orosius, *History against the Pagans* 7.37.8–9; Sidonius Apollinaris, *Letters* 1.7, 2.1, 5.5.
 14. Cassius Dio 76.10; Libanius, *Orations* 30; Aurelius Victor, *On the Emperors* 24–27; Vegetius, *De Re Militari* 2.
 15. Augustine, *City of God* 5.23; Gillian Clark, “Augustine and the Merciful Barbarians,” in Mathisen and Shanzer, *Romans*, 33–42.
 16. Symmachus, *Relatio* 3.3.
 17. Prudentius 1.449, 458–59.
 18. Barbara Levick, “Morals, Politics, and the Fall of the Roman Republic,” *Greece and Rome* 29, no. 1 (April 1982): 53–62; Holly Haynes, “Tacitus’s Dangerous Word,” *Classical Antiquity* 23, no. 1 (April 2004): 33–61.
 19. Richard W. Burgess, “Hydatius and the Final Frontier,” in *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. Ralph W. Mathisen and Hagith S. Sivan (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 321–32; Lucy Grig, “Deconstructing the Symbolic City: Jerome as a Guide to Late Antique Rome,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 80 (2012).
 20. Walter Goffart, “The Maps of the Barbarian Invasions: A Longer Look,” in *The Culture of Christendom: Essays in Honor of Dennis L. T. Bethell*, ed. Marc A. Meyer (London: Hambledon, 1993), 1–27; Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–35.
 21. Michael E. Jones, *The End of Roman Britain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2012).
 22. Guy Halsall, “Movers and Shakers: The Barbarians and the Fall of Rome,” *Early Medieval Europe* 8 (1999).
 23. Herodian 6.7–9.
 24. Herodian 7.1; *Historia Augusta* “Maximinus” 2.5.
 25. Zosimus, *New History* 1.15.
 26. The disease in question may have been smallpox or a hemorrhagic fever similar to Ebola. See Kyle Harper, “Pandemics and Passages to Late Antiquity: Rethinking the Plague of c. 249–70 as Described by Cyprian,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 28 (2015): 223–60.
 27. Mary Elizabeth Kelly Thornton, “Nero’s New Deal,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 102 (1971): 621–29.
 28. Alfred Wassink, “Inflation and Financial Policy under the Roman Empire to the Price Edict of 301 A.D.,” *Historia* 40, no. 4 (1991): 465–93; Morris Silver, “Finding the Roman Empire’s Disappeared Deposit Bankers,” *Historia* 60, no. 3 (2011): 1–27.
 29. Richard Duncan-Jones, “Economic Change and the Transition to Late Antiquity,” in *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, ed. Simon Swain and Mark Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20–52.
 30. John F. Drinkwater, *The Gallic Empire: Separatism and Continuity in the North-Western Provinces of the Roman Empire* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1987); Andrew M. Smith II, *Roman Palmyra: Identity, Community, and State Formation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
 31. Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 18–32.
 32. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 134–41.
 33. Michel Gawlikowski, “Les princes de Palmyre,” *Syria* 62, no. 3 (1985): 251–61.
 34. Peter the Patrician, *History*, frag. 10.
 35. *Historia Augusta*, “Thirty Pretenders” 15.
 36. Harold Mattingly, “The Palmyrene Princes and the Mints of Antioch and Alexandria,”

37. Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 161–63.

38. *Ibid.*, 163–65.

39. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 135–39.

40. Mohammad Rihan, *The Politics and Culture of an Umayyad Tribe: Conflict and Factionalism in the Early Islamic Period* (London: Tauris, 2014), 43.

41. Ball, *Rome in the East*, 98–102.

42. Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk* 1.833–34.

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REMEMBERING THE BARBARIANS

When I was an undergraduate student, one of the older history professors at my college informed our class that, whatever else we may think of Julius Caesar, we must give him credit for one great accomplishment: he brought civilization to Gaul. Some of us objected. Surely, the people of Gaul had a civilization before Caesar. Roman ways were not the only way of being civilized. In any case, what kind of a civilization was Caesar bringing when he killed or enslaved half the population? These arguments failed to move our professor. He could not conceive of a definition of civilization that did not depend on Greece and Rome.

There are few historians today who would agree with my old professor's opinion of Caesar or defend his definition of civilization, but he spoke for a long tradition in Western thought that was uncontroversial until only a few generations ago.¹ For more than a thousand years, Europeans and their cultural descendants have looked back to ancient Greek and Roman literature, philosophy, art, and society as guiding models of civilization. Classical Latin literature formed the basis of education in the European Middle Ages and long afterward. The legislators who drafted new constitutions in the wake of revolutions in Europe and its colonies abroad drew on Greek and Roman models. The cities of Europe and its colonies adorned themselves by importing or imitating Greco-Roman art.

Another part of the classical legacy was the idea of barbarians. A collection of historical narratives and literary models were passed down which Westerners have employed to describe their own relationships with other peoples—and with certain elements of Western society itself.

Redefining the Barbarians

Interactions between peoples of different cultural backgrounds in the ancient Mediterranean spanned an enormous variety of possibilities. So did Greek and Roman responses to those interactions. As the memory of the realities of {254} Greek and Roman life faded from post-Roman Europe, the complex legacy of ancient cultural relationships tended to be reduced to a few major themes.

The literature of the ancient Mediterranean had a skewed perspective on

intercultural relations to begin with. It was mostly written by the elite and largely concentrated on the concerns of that class, such as politics, war, and the intellectual pastimes of the idle rich. In an age when literacy rates were low and book production costly, this literature was gradually filtered as tastes and values changed. Many works were lost in antiquity or survived only in fragments preserved out of antiquarian interest.

Two important forces acted on late Roman literature to shape the legacy that came down to the post-Roman world: the disintegration of the western empire and the rise of Christianity. Both of these trends favored polarizing narratives. Late Roman literature turned toward a set of tropes that starkly opposed Romans and barbarians as a way of bolstering an embattled Roman identity (see Chapter 12). For similar reasons, many Christian authors portrayed a world divided between Christians and pagans. As part of the Christian movement's struggles for acceptance in the Roman world, traditional Roman values such as *virtus* (courage) and *pietas* (respect for social hierarchy) were reinterpreted with Christian meanings, as reflected by their English descendants: "virtue" and "piety." (The term *paganus* itself was originally a term of urban snobbery akin to "country bumpkin." It was similarly repurposed into a term of religious snobbery as Christianity took root in the cities of the late empire.) As Christianity aligned itself with Romanness, non-Christians were portrayed as exemplars of the moral failings often associated with barbarians, such as treachery, greed, lust, and violence.² The Greek and Roman literary legacy that was passed down to the medieval world emphasized the division between two opposing modes of life, one Greco-Roman/Christian and the other barbarian/pagan.

In addition to this sense of opposition, some classical debates and conventional narratives about barbarians were also passed down. One important question was what defined a people as barbarians. Various lines of argument had been entertained, including language, culture, environmental influences, and lineage, but the question had never been settled. A closely related debate was whether barbarism was an inherent quality or a condition out of which it was possible to rise (or which the civilized might sink into). These arguments took on new complications in Christian thought. On one hand, Christianity espoused a mission of conversion and the universal embrace of humanity. Anyone could become Christian, regardless of culture, language, or birth. Better to be a Christian barbarian, some Roman Christians argued, {255} than a Roman pagan.³ On the other hand, the Christian community itself fractured through heresy and schism. As Christianity grew from being a persecuted minority to the new cultural norm, old divisions of culture and ethnicity regained their potency as part of arguments about the right way to be Christian.⁴

As spoken languages diverged farther away from classical Latin and Greek, classical literature became accessible only to the educated elite. As such, it took on an aura of authority on matters of politics, science, philosophy, and other elite concerns. The images of foreign peoples constructed by Greek and Roman authors were imbued with this same authority, and many ancient accounts of

ethnic character became standard parts of how the people of the West described the world around them. Some of these stereotypes were particular to individual peoples, such as the association of Egypt with magic and primordial wisdom, or Tacitus' assertion (much beloved by German nationalists) that the Germanic tribes had never mingled their bloodlines with those of other peoples.⁵ Other narratives were broader and made up two archetypes for describing barbarian cultures. One of these archetypes was assembled from conventional descriptions of societies that, from the Greek and Roman perspective, seemed small and poor, such as the Gauls, Germans, and Scythians. The other depended on traditional accounts of complex, wealthy societies, such as the Carthaginians, Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Persians. As the late Roman Empire faced frontier pressure from smaller societies along its northern frontier and the Sasanian kingdom to the east, these archetypes came to be associated with the North and the East, respectively.⁶

These archetypes were more than compilations of historical memories and literary tropes. They expressed a Greco-Roman sense of identity by positing two general classes of others who represented both the importance and the dangers of civilization. The northern barbarians represented the lack of civilization, in both its positive and negative aspects. They were noble savages, ignorant of all but the most rudimentary benefits of civilization. Their rugged lives gave them physical hardiness, but they lacked self-control. They could be honest and morally upright, untainted by the corruption of luxury, but they could also be brutish: cannibalism and human sacrifice were typical behaviors. In their sexual morals, they either displayed a natural virtue, or else they were so innocent of the possessive instinct that they thought nothing of {256} sharing sexual partners in common. Unaccustomed to luxury, they were incapable of moderation once they got a taste of it, which made them inclined to drunkenness and gaudy self-adornment.

The eastern barbarians were the opposite, displaying the dangers of losing oneself to the pleasures of civilization. They were the keepers of ancient wisdom, and at their best they could be courteous, honorable, and generous, but exposure to luxury made them weak-willed and greedy. Unable to govern their own emotions, they lived lives of self-indulgence and sexual perversion. They lived under the rule of tyrants, being so unaccustomed to freedom that they did not know how to live without a despot to govern them. The men of these societies were weak and effeminate while the women were ambitious and demanding. Some men were controlled by women's whims, while other men went to extreme and abusive lengths to suppress women's influence. The people of these cultures could display a sharp intellect, but their cunning made them devious and unreliable, apt to swindle anyone they dealt with and betray any ally.

These archetypes, like all such literary constructs, were nebulous, inconsistent, and prone to subversion and reinterpretation. The Greek and Roman writers, philosophers, and artists who constructed them did not always take them seriously or believe that they were adequate to describe the world's peoples, but

these archetypes provided the basic structure around which many Greeks and Romans constructed interpretations of other cultures and critiques of their own. The images of the northern and eastern barbarians were passed down as part of the classical literary legacy and became part of the toolkit of Western thought when confronting foreign cultures.

From the End of Rome to the Twenty-First Century

The Western posterity that received this Greco-Roman legacy did not do so passively. In every age since the end of the western Roman Empire, those who have regarded themselves as the heirs of Greece and Rome have wielded its traditions selectively and purposefully to serve their own needs. Classical ideas about barbarians have been as much subject to this repurposing as Greek philosophy and Roman architecture.

Classical narratives were useful even to those whose ancestors had been among the barbarians, such as the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monk Bede. Composing his history of Britain in a monastery within walking distance of the ruins of Hadrian's Wall, among the descendants of people who had invaded Britain across the North Sea and established their kingdoms in the ruins of the Roman province, Bede was in every sense at the outermost edge of the Roman world. Nevertheless, the Roman Empire was central to his conception of history. In Bede's account, the Anglo-Saxons were savage {257} barbarians who had been elevated into a civilized state by the greatest gift of Roman culture: Christianity.⁷

In the second half of the first millennium CE, Western Europe was beset by invaders who were outsiders to Greco-Roman Christian civilization: Muslims from the south, Magyars from the east, and Vikings from the north. Western Christians often drew on classical concepts of the barbarian to describe the invaders. The northern archetype served well for the Vikings and Magyars, but for Islam many medieval accounts drew on the eastern archetype. *The Song of Roland*, a French epic poem from around 1100, offers a characteristic example. The epic transformed a historical ambush of Frankish soldiers by Basques into a grand confrontation between Franks and Muslims in Spain. Many of the Muslims are portrayed as rich and sophisticated but also cowardly and devious, while a few stand out as honorable knights.⁸

As Europeans began to explore, colonize, and conquer the rest of the world in the sixteenth century, they looked back to ancient literature and philosophy to categorize the wide variety of cultures they found themselves interacting with. Through the centuries of imperialism and colonialism, ancient arguments about different kinds of barbarians were brought out and put to work, whether to justify imperial policies or critique them.

In parts of the Americas, Africa, Australia, and Oceania, Europeans encountered societies that seemed, from their perspective, small and unsophisticated. Models drawn from the northern archetype were widely applied

to these peoples. These models tended to simplify complex and diverse cultures into familiar patterns that were convenient for Europeans, often disregarding the actual sophistication, technological prowess, and interconnectedness of local cultures. Lurid accounts of violence, cannibalism, and human sacrifice, for example, were a staple of early explorers' reports and popular accounts. The tendency to describe native cultures in these regions as "tribal," regardless of their actual social structure, made the people seem simple and uncultured. Specific stereotypes, such as Native North Americans' tendency to drunkenness or Africans' sexual promiscuity, played on themes of defective self-control.⁹ Sometimes the analogies were even more explicit, as {258} when British settlers in South Africa invoked the wanderings of barbarians in the late Roman period to explain the movements of native African groups.¹⁰

The image of barbarian ignorance, violence, and indiscipline was invoked to justify the mass enslavement of indigenous Americans and black Africans, but ancient theories of barbarism were also invoked by slavery's opponents. These arguments were framed as early as 1550, when a debate was held in Valladolid, Spain, between Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who argued for the enslavement of the natives in Spain's American colonies, and Bartolomé de las Casas, who advocated for respecting the native peoples' sovereignty while gently instructing them in Christianity. Sepúlveda argued that the natives belonged to the category of barbarian that Aristotle had defined as "natural slaves," incapable of intellectual or moral improvement. Enslavement was therefore a blessing to them since it brought them under control of a civilized people. Las Casas argued instead that the natives were not inherently inferior. They were in an inferior state because they had not accepted the true Christian faith, but they had the capacity for justice, good self-government, and religious piety. With compassionate instruction, he was certain, they would willingly accept Christianity and attain the same degree of civilization as the Spanish.¹¹

In other parts of the world, such as the Ottoman Empire, Persia, India, China, Japan, and parts of Mesoamerica, Westerners encountered societies whose scale, technology, social organization, and wealth rivaled or exceeded their own and who could not be dismissed as "savages." In these places, European thinkers often made recourse to the Eastern barbarian archetype, with similar stereotyping effects. The "Orient"—a vaguely defined setting that could be placed anywhere between Morocco and Japan—was imagined as a place of ancient mystery, exotic luxury, palace intrigue, and sexual deviancy. Literary tropes such as the spice-scented air of the East or fabled cities of gold in Mesoamerica represented both outlandish wonder and extraordinary wealth. European fantasies reimaged Islamic households as scandalous harems of sexual oppression, while political theorists classified the centralized governments of the Ottoman, Persian, Indian, and Chinese states as quintessential "Oriental" tyrannies.¹²

{259} The ancient conflicts between Persians and Greeks were drafted into service as a historical model for struggles not only between East and West but within Europe. During the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s, the English

poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote a version of Aeschylus' *The Persians* that recast the Persian characters as the court of the Ottoman Empire and added a chorus of captive Greek maidens. Just a few years before, the British Parliament had been contemplating building a replica of the Athenian Parthenon to commemorate the victory over Napoleon at Waterloo, thus positioning the British as Greeks and the French as Persians. The image of Western history as a long struggle for liberty against tyranny, beginning in the Greek resistance to Persia and culminating in modern democracy, became a staple of European historiography. The feeling of a connection to ancient Greece was so potent that in 1846 the philosopher John Stuart Mill described the Battle of Marathon as the first great event of English history. Not for nothing did Gilbert and Sullivan's overeducated Major-General Stanley boast that he could "quote the fights historical from Marathon to Waterloo in order categorical."¹³

Even today, ancient accounts of barbarians continue to provide models for ethnic and racial stereotypes. The modern image of the "ecological Indian" evokes the ancient "noble savage."¹⁴ Hostile Western attitudes to Islam often fall back on eastern barbarian themes such as despotism, deceitfulness, and the repression of women. The notion of a predestined struggle between Western freedom and Eastern tyranny has been reinvigorated in some modern commentary with "Sharia law" taking the place of "Oriental despotism."¹⁵ Racial stereotypes that paint African Americans as lazy and violent reproduce Tacitus' judgment of the Germans: "You cannot persuade them to work the soil and wait for the harvest as readily as to challenge the enemy and take wounds. On the contrary, they think it dull and stupid to gain by sweat what they could win with blood."¹⁶

{260} Classical images of barbarians have informed not only our interpretations of the real world but the worlds of fiction. Modern versions of ancient barbarians sometimes make their way to the page or the screen, such as the wild Germanic tribesmen who appear at the beginning of the movie *Gladiator* or the depraved, gold-bedecked Persians of *300*. The barbarians of classical literature have also shaped fictional peoples outside of Greco-Roman settings, such as Howard's Conan, who gave the term a positive spin. J. R. R. Tolkien, though not calling them "barbarians," evoked similar positive qualities in his Riders of Rohan. The long-standing alliance between Rohan and the kingdom of Gondor is reminiscent of some of Rome's relationships with northern peoples and suggests that barbarians and civilized states can coexist to their mutual benefit.

Fantasy and science fiction have also widely drawn on the northern and eastern archetypes to create alternative cultures. Tolkien's vicious Orcs and aloof Elves reflect aspects of these archetypes. So do *Star Trek's* warlike Klingons and devious Romulans, or *Babylon 5's* pugnacious Narn and decadent Centauri. George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* books, and their television adaptation *Game of Thrones*, imagine a realm modeled on Western Europe whose people contend with both wild, technologically backward peoples from the north and rich, dissolute kingdoms to the east.

The barbarians that have populated historical narratives, political rhetoric, and fiction since the medieval era serve the same purposes as the imagined barbarians of ancient literature. They are others who reflect back to us either the virtues we wish we possessed or the flaws we proclaim ourselves free of. In today's world in which we have many different ways of defining our own identities and relating ourselves to others, Greek and Roman narratives continue to supply us with models for describing those we see as different from ourselves. Classical ideas about barbarians are not the only tools we have for thinking about cross-cultural relationships any more than Greek and Roman societies are our only models of civilization, but they are ideas to which we keep returning.

In the past several centuries, the legacy of Greece and Rome has often been wielded by Europeans and their cultural descendants as a weapon of exclusion and domination against the peoples of the rest of the world. It is vital that we see this history and understand its effects. It is also vital that we see past it to the realities of the ancient world.

Multiculturalism is not a modern invention. Neither is cultural conflict nor prejudice nor ethnocentrism. The prosperity of ancient Greece depended on the willingness of Greek traders, artisans, poets, soldiers, and others to learn from and work with people of many different cultures. At the same time, many Greeks also denigrated, fought with, and enslaved people from foreign societies. The success of the Roman Empire was linked to a tradition of openness and an ability to incorporate other peoples into Roman society.

{261} The success of the empire also meant the mass slaughter of some conquered peoples and the widespread exploitation of foreign slaves and frontier dwellers. Some Greeks and Romans told stories about outsiders that mocked, dismissed, or misunderstood the world beyond their borders. Others looked outward with respect, admiration, and sensitivity. There is no simple story to be told about how Greeks and Romans thought about and interacted with other peoples in the world.

In this respect, the ancient peoples of the Mediterranean were very much like ourselves. We also live in a world of cultural interconnections, some of them rooted in histories of exploitation and violence, others in cooperation and inclusion. The challenges and possibilities of living in a multicultural world were as real to them as they are to us. There may be no simple story about Greeks, Romans, and barbarians, but simple stories are the most apt to deceive. The most valuable lessons we can take from ancient intercultural experiences are their complexity and uncertainty.

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